

Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [LetterFromErbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Monday, December 01, 2008 3:27 PM
Subject: Kurdistan Regional Government Responds to Iraq Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's Accusations

Full Text of the KRG Response to Iraqi Prime Minister's Accusations

Kurdistan Regional Government Responds to Iraq Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's Accusations of 20 November 2008

December 1, 2008

The development of good governance that effectively serves all the people all the time, in all corners of Iraq, is a long and extremely difficult work in progress. This work began with the overthrow of the former regime in 2003. It went through three interim governments culminating in the overwhelming approval of the Constitution in 2005 and the formation of a permanent government in 2006. From this initial formation of structure and system, the process has been progressing toward establishing partnerships and procedures, albeit sometimes with severe difficulty.

With due understanding and full respect for the traumatic history we have been passing through, which must neither be forgotten nor repeated, and the excessive burden of our troubled legacies, it is not surprising that the process of developing good governance is indeed so difficult.

It is thus unfortunate and deeply regrettable that the press conference of Iraq's Prime Minister illustrates efforts being made to take the people of Iraq back to a period we are desperately trying to get beyond. It was a period where the excessive concentration, or centralization, of economic and political power condemned all Iraqi peoples to unimaginable suffering.

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's press conference focused on a letter from the Iraqi Presidency Council questioning the formation of "Support Councils." In reaction to this letter, the Prime Minister singled out the Kurdistan Region and described certain of its policies and actions to be unconstitutional.

Given the seriousness of these allegations, it is important that all Iraqis are better informed and become educated regarding the issues and facts.

"Support Councils"

These are tribal councils directly affiliated with the Office of the Prime Minister of the federal government. The Office has been contacting people in the Kurdistan Region, and in the so-called disputed areas. The people being contacted include former collaborators who were closely linked to the security and intelligence agencies of the defunct regime of Saddam Hussein.

The purpose is to enlist these people into forming groups that support the Prime Minister in the disputed areas. The groups are to be armed and they are to become part of the government structure, organized, equipped, and paid for by the federal government.

The former collaborators, who include tribal leaders of the Kurdistan Region, in the past, conspired against fellow citizens. They took active part in military operations that detained, tortured, and killed fellow citizens,

including civilian women and children, for political reasons. They aided and abetted the forcing of thousands of families to migrate from their homes, and in destroying their communities.

Following the 1991 war and uprising, however, the Kurdistan Front, a consortium of opposition political groups, issued a general amnesty to all collaborators on the condition that they never again participate in such treachery and violations of human rights.

The Office of the Prime Minister has also contacted collaborators who actively participated in the Anfal, a campaign that the international community has determined to be genocide. These persons, who have been on the run since 1991, were not included in the general amnesty.

The amnesty successfully called for surrendering of arms and serving the part of Iraq that was liberated during the period 1991 to 2003. It began a new chapter, a process of reconciliation that led to a still deepening sense of forgiveness and tolerance. This was, indeed, an important strategy to engender and promote levels of personal security and political stability that the people of the Kurdistan Region enjoy today.

A result of this policy is that the Kurdistan Region became a safe haven for many former non-Kurdish Iraqi opposition leaders and their families. The Region became the stage for opposition groups to organize their activities against the former regime. Most of these groups are now part of the political process within the government of a new Iraq.

Enlisting such pro-regime collaborators into “Support Councils” in the Kurdistan Region and in the “disputed areas” could very well have the following effects:

1. Instability and discord within the Kurdistan Region on the order of what occurred during the rule of the former regime.
2. The creation of divisions in national reconciliation within the Kurdistan Region.
3. The creation of security lapses that allow infiltration of terrorists into the Region.
4. The creation of armed groups in the “disputed areas” that cause destabilization, divisions, and strife.

Establishing these “Support Councils” was not a consensus decision of the Iraqi Council of Ministers. Whether the councils are constitutional is a matter to be determined by the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the Iraqi Presidency Council, or the Federal Supreme Court.

The duty of the government is to create an environment conducive to reconciliation, not to reverse the progress already made. The government has the responsibility to provide security, not to create insecurity. The mission of the government is to create tolerance, not to plant the seeds of division.

These “Support Councils” cannot, and will not, contribute to national reconciliation. Nor can they contribute to peace and stability. These councils would have only a destabilizing effect because they are a re-creation of Saddam-era collaborator groups who brought death and destruction to the Kurdistan Region.

It would appear that the intention of these councils is to undermine the Kurdistan Region and to thwart reconstruction and development in an important part of Iraq. This counters the federal government’s responsibility to ensure security and to promote the political process. It counters efforts of the Kurdistan Region to promote national reconciliation and to shield it against forces that aim to destroy it.

Let us be clear. The days of generating divisions and sowing discord by government among the people of

Kurdistan are over. Such attempts stem only from forces opposed to democratizing the political process. These efforts work against the unity and coalition federal government.

It is not surprising that such attempts have met with public denunciations before official responses have been made. These efforts pose a real danger and could lead to sedition, under the pretext of national reconciliation.

Constitutional Issues

Though the Prime Minister has taken the oath to promote and protect the Constitution of Iraq - as it currently exists - it is, indeed, disconcerting when he cites the Constitution in attacking others while apparently violating it when taking unilateral decisions. The Prime Minister is obligated to act within the limits of the current constitution and not in accordance with a future constitution he may prefer.

The new order in Iraq is based on the Constitution that was approved in a countrywide referendum. In his press conference, the Prime Minister regrettably offered opinion that the leadership and people of the Kurdistan Region are demanding more than what the Constitution allows.

In response, let us re-examine the Constitution, specifically the distribution of powers. According to Article-110, the exclusive powers of the federal government include formulating foreign policy; national security; formulating fiscal policy; regulating standards, weights, and measures; regulating immigration, residency, and citizenship; regulating the policies of broadcast frequencies and mail; drawing up the general and investment budget bill; and planning policies relating to water sources.

As for the powers of the regions, Article-121 states, “The regional powers shall have the right to exercise executive, legislative, and judicial powers in accordance with this Constitution, except for those authorities stipulated to be the exclusive authorities of the federal government.”

The Constitution, thus, clearly specifies the distribution of powers. The Kurdistan Region seeks no more power than the Constitution allows. It only seeks that the Constitution be implemented.

Oil and Gas Contracts

The Prime Minister has described the oil contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional Government to be in violation of the Constitution.

On existing oil and gas fields, Article-112 of the Constitution affirms:

“First: The federal government, with the producing governorates and regional governments, shall undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from present fields provided that it distributes its revenues in a fair manner in proportion to the population distribution in all parts of the country, specifying an allotment for a specified period for the damaged regions which were unjustly deprived of them by the former regime, and the regions that were damaged afterwards in a way that ensures balanced development in different areas of the country, and this shall be regulated by law.

“Second: The federal government, with the producing regional and governorate governments, shall together formulate the necessary strategic policies to develop the oil and gas wealth in a way that achieves the highest benefit to the Iraqi people using the most advanced techniques of market principles, and encouraging investment.”

As for future oilfields and future exploration, Article-115 is very clear that “all powers not stipulated in the exclusive powers of the federal government belong to the authorities of the regions and governorates that are not organized in a region. With regard to other powers shared between the federal government and the regional

government, priority shall be given to the law of the regions and governorates not organized in a region in case of dispute.”

Article-141 of the Constitution also states that legislation enacted in the Kurdistan Region since 1992 shall remain in force, and decisions issued by the Kurdistan Regional Government, including court decisions and contracts, shall be considered valid unless they are amended or annulled pursuant to the laws of the Kurdistan Region by the competent entity in the Region, provided that they do not contradict the Constitution.

The issue centers on the status of oil contracts. Some of the oil contracts were signed even before the Constitution was written. Article-141 clearly establishes the legality of these contracts. As for the newly-signed contracts, which concern new oilfields, they all fall under the terms of Article-115 and Article-111 of the Constitution.

This calls for some explanation. On 15 February 2007, there was agreement on a draft hydrocarbon law. There was also a letter to the Iraqi Council of Ministers, dated 26 February 2007, signed by both the Iraqi President and Kurdistan Region President that was approved as an annex to the draft law. This letter urged the approval of the draft oil and gas law by the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR, the national parliament), and the establishment of appropriate structures and mechanisms specified in the draft law.

The letter also said that if the draft law is not passed by the COR by the end of May 2007, then both sides would have the right to sign oil development and production contracts as per the Constitution. Thus, agreement on the draft law and the annex letter was clear. The annex letter also contains several conditions and commitments that have still not been met by the federal government. The question is why.

If we look at the Kurdistan Region’s oil contracts from an economic and oil-industry point of view, it is clear that:

1. These are oilfield development and oil exploration contracts that would promote capacity-building in the oil industry in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
2. Increasing oil production in the Kurdistan Region increases production for all Iraq.
3. Oil sale revenues, whether from the Kurdistan Region or from Basra in southern Iraq, accrue as national income for all Iraq.
4. The oil industry's infrastructure has not made any progress in other parts of Iraq as a result of the disastrous policies of the federal government, despite having spent around 8 billion dollars on this industry. In fact there has been a reduction in oil production and oil export. If this is the state of oil policy in Baghdad, should we be part of the failure or should we continue with our own oil policy in the Kurdistan Region to develop local capacity and attract expertise in the industry, so that we can contribute to a sound oil policy for the whole Iraq? What we have done is first and foremost in the interest of the whole country and then that of the Kurdistan Region.

Thus, increasing oil production and capacity-building in the Kurdistan Region is good for the country. Our actions have been constitutional and our contracts are good for all the people of Iraq.

Further, Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani has repeatedly said that if there have been any actions by the Kurdistan Region, including the signing of oil contracts, that are in any way in violation of the Constitution, we are prepared to review our position, acknowledge our errors, and abandon our actions. We believe the Constitution has the last word; all our actions derive their legitimacy from the Constitution.

It is also worth pointing out that in his policy announcement in June 2006, the Prime Minister confirmed his commitment to draft a new hydrocarbon law when he said “we will draft new legislation to regulate the

hydrocarbon sector (oil and gas) which will also include the rights of regions and governorates as per the Constitution.”

US Military Bases in the Kurdistan Region

We would like to clarify the matter of inviting the US Military to establish bases in the Kurdistan Region, which the Prime Minister described as unconstitutional. This issue was raised when the Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani was asked a question recently in Washington DC. The question centered on “if” the Region would be prepared to host US Military bases. The President responded in the affirmative.

There is nothing new here. On behalf of the people of the Kurdistan Region, President Barzani, before most other Iraqi leaders, has repeatedly called for the signing of the status-of-forces agreement between Iraq and the United States. He has supported this policy for the good of all Iraq.

It is well known that there are currently no US military bases in the Kurdistan Region. “If” an agreement is signed, and “if” there is a request to have a US Military base in the Kurdistan Region, then there would be no objection.

Travel to the Kurdistan Region

The Federal Prime Minister pointed to restrictions on Iraqis travelling to the Kurdistan Region from other parts of Iraq, including the requirement that travelers must obtain an affidavit or proclamation from a local resident before they can travel to the Region. This may sound as if Iraqi citizens are prevented from travelling to the Kurdistan Region.

First, it is important to consider figures on Iraqi citizens who have become residents of the Kurdistan Region after fleeing threats of violence in other parts of the country. Our figures indicate that 10,559 Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, and Christian families have fled to, and now reside in, Erbil province. In Duhok province, the figure is 17,980 families. And in Sulaimniya province, it is 6,312 families.

In addition, some 1,900 university lecturers from outside the Kurdistan Region have joined universities in the Region. At least 3,740 students from Baghdad and Mosul and other places study in the Region’s universities. About 14,543 people from other parts of Iraq work as laborers in Erbil province while in Duhok the figure is 9,500.

As for restrictions on travel to the Region, it should be pointed out that there are more checkpoints in Baghdad than the total of all other checkpoints in the country. The Kurdistan Region has also been a target for terrorists. Some of our most prominent political leaders and many others have been victims.

As elsewhere in Iraq, checkpoints screen all travelers entering the Kurdistan Region regardless of their ethnic and religious background, whether they are Kurd, Arab, Turkmen, others, or foreigners. The procedures are not unlike those followed elsewhere in the country.

All peace loving people are welcome. This past summer, hotels in Duhok, Shaqlawa, Suleimaniyah, and other places in the Kurdistan Region, were full of guests from Baghdad, Mosul, and other parts of the country.

The Kurdistan Region accepts full responsibility for the security of all visitors and citizens alike regardless of their origin or background. The laws of the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi Constitution allow us, and, in fact, they obligate us, to provide security in the Region. The measures we take are purely for security reasons to protect lives.

It should not be forgotten that in the past the Kurdistan Region was a sanctuary for people fleeing the

oppression of the former regime. The mountains of our Region embraced them, including many of Iraq's current leaders and their families. Many Christian families, Sabeans, and others who have fled the threat of violence have relocated to our Region. The doors of the Kurdistan Region shall remain open to all, except to terrorists.

Confrontation between Kurdistan Region forces and federal forces

The Prime Minister has referred to Kurdistan Region security forces as rebels even though they have consistently served the political process in the country. Indeed, in the early days, they were the only regular Iraqi force following the collapse of the former regime. Since then, they have played a key role in defeating terrorists and outlaws.

Kurdish military units are part of the Iraqi Army. If the Prime Minister was referring to the Kurdistan Regional Guards, the Peshmerga, these forces are authorized per Constitution Article-I21 which states, "The regional government shall be responsible for all administrative requirements of the region, particularly the establishment and organization of the internal security forces for the region such as police, security forces, and guards of the region."

The unfortunate and regrettable confrontation in Khanaqin was due to the unfortunate manner in which decisions were taken and regrettable miscommunication of orders. In effect, however, this incident emanated from excessive delay in implementing Constitution Article-I40 for which the federal government is responsible.

Constitution Article-I17 clearly recognizes the Kurdistan Region as a federal region but does not define its final boundaries. Constitution Article-I43 accepts that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is the official government of certain specified territory. And, Article-I40 calls for the disposition of other territories to be determined in accordance with a specified democratic process.

The boundary per Article-143 was unilaterally, and undemocratically, determined in October 1991. This boundary was militarized and within one month, in November 1991, more than 20,000 families were forced to migrate from areas south of the line - mostly from Kirkuk areas - to the territory north of the line.

Constitution Article-I40 lays down a clear road map to define the final boundaries of the territory to be governed by the KRG. The excessive delay in implementing this article is the primary cause of tension and administrative problems in the so-called disputed areas. These are areas that suffered severely from ethnic cleansing and community destruction under the former regime.

Failure to implement Article-I40 is also in violation of the policy of the Iraqi government which the Prime Minister announced in June 2006. The Prime Minister stated that "the government will be committed to implement Article-I40 of the Constitution which is based on Article-58 of the 'Law of Administration for the State of Iraq'. The Article specifies three phases for the implementation of this Article which include normalization, census, and a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed areas. The government will start by taking the appropriate steps for the normalization phase, including by rejoining of the detached districts and sub-districts back to Kirkuk governorate, and complete this phase no later than 29 March 2007. The census phase will be completed by 31 July 2007 and the referendum phase by 15 November 2007. The question is why the Prime Minister has not met his commitments.

Attempts to send in the Iraqi Army and the creation of so-called "Support Councils" in these disputed areas are clearly intended to impede and abort the implementation of Article-140. The incident at Khanaqin was never about the deployment of the Iraqi army for security purposes. The area was already secure. It was, indeed, an attempt to change the facts on the ground, an attempt to bypass the Constitution.

The Iraqi Army did not face confrontation. What was confronted were orders and instructions taken unilaterally

with flagrant political motives. The army was ordered to enter a peaceful and secure town that falls within the disputed areas of Article-140. There was no specific military objective. This kind of behavior poses a danger to the Iraqi Army and to the country.

The use of the national army to settle internal disagreements and political disputes is a violation of the Constitution. Constitution Article-9 states, “The Iraqi armed forces and security services will be composed of the components of the Iraqi people with due consideration given to their balance and representation without discrimination or exclusion. They shall be subject to the control of the civilian authority, shall defend Iraq, shall not be used as an instrument to oppress the Iraqi people, shall not interfere in political affairs, and shall have no role in the transfer of authority.”

Kurdistan Region representation offices abroad

In his remarks, the Prime Minister also talks about the opening of diplomatic offices abroad by the Kurdistan Region and describes them as a violation of the constitution. Once again, let the Constitution be the guide. Article-121 says, “Offices for the regions and governorates shall be established in embassies and diplomatic missions in order to follow cultural, social, and developmental affairs.”

Thus, the Constitution allows the establishing of diplomatic offices abroad. The expression “Offices for the regions and governorates shall be established” in this article implies that the initiative would be either from the Region or the federal government. Most probably this implies that the offices shall be established jointly by the two parties.

We cannot claim that the federal government has not taken any steps to initiate this process, and we are also not claiming that we do not share any of the blame for this. But foreign policy is the exclusive responsibility of the federal government and the federal government should have taken the initiative. This issue requires examination of past practices and current requirements.

Part of the Kurdistan Region was liberated territory since 1991 and operated autonomously in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 688 until the overthrow of the former regime in 2003. The Iraqi government unilaterally withdrew all administrative structures from the Region in October 1991. Legal and administrative institutions such as the regional parliament and the regional government were established following internationally-observed free and fair regional elections in May 1992.

The former Iraqi opposition parties, including the Prime Minister’s own party, dealt with the Kurdistan Region as a liberated part of Iraq. In late 1992, the Region hosted the largest gathering of Iraqi opposition parties. It was at this conference that the principle of federalism was formally proposed and adopted for Iraq.

During that time, there obviously was no diplomatic representation for the Kurdistan Region or other Iraqi opposition parties in Iraq’s embassies abroad. The opposition parties, including those of the Region, opened offices in a number of countries and the representatives of the Kurdistan Region abroad were among the most active.

Because of the large number of Iraqi Kurdish communities abroad, the Kurdistan Region’s representatives played an important role in helping to shape public opinion against the regime of Saddam Hussein. They were always available to help all Iraqi opposition parties, including the party of the Prime Minister.

The realities of Iraq, the existence of large Kurdish communities outside the country, and the need to shape public opinion abroad, all were factors that obliged us to have representation abroad. And now, we are ready to discuss and find a new arrangement for these offices, as soon as possible. We are also ready to take the initiative and propose our views, especially after the recent adoption of the foreign service law by the Iraqi parliament.

Abiding by the Constitution

The Kurdistan Region Presidency and the Kurdistan Regional Government are fully ready to enter negotiations to resolve all outstanding issues based on the Constitution. All sides, including the party of the Prime Minister, feel that the whole process is not moving in the right direction and that something needs to be done.

By acknowledging this situation, five committees have been established to determine a way forward on the contentious issues of consensus government; concept of partnership and the decisionmaking process; matters pertaining to security and the army; the problem of disputed areas; foreign policy; and the problems concerning the hydrocarbon law and budget. These five committees are composed of representatives from each of two Kurdistan parties, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Iraqi Islamic Party, and the Islamic Dawa Party. We will abide by the recommendations of these committees.

A great deal is at stake. The Prime Minister calls on everyone to abide by the Constitution. In 2006, he described the Constitution as “among the best constitutions in the world because it is based on freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.” In a speech on 8 November 2008, however, he said, “The Constitution was written in a hasty way and under extraordinary conditions. It limits the powers of the central government and it is feared that federalism will handicap the country.”

In other words, the Prime Minister considers the Constitution of Iraq to be the problem, a constitution which he took the oath to protect and implement. In fact, failure to abide by the Constitution is the problem.

The Prime Minister believes that centralization is the key to the problems of Iraq. Iraq’s history, however, has proven that centralization is dangerous. It has resulted in the country being controlled by a select group, and eventually by a single party and single individual.

The party of the Prime Minister was a victim of centralization. The people of southern Iraq were marginalized. The people of Kurdistan Region were considered second-class citizens. And the elite members of the Dulaimi tribe and western Iraq were brutally oppressed like others.

Not abiding by the Constitution portends the ominous:

1. The Prime Minister aims to suspend the Constitution. Despite his talk about the need to make amendments to the Constitution, what he really wants is to suspend the Constitution; a constitution which he participated in drafting and for which he has expressed admiration. The idea of suspending the constitution is a very dangerous action indeed. Amendments can be made to the Constitution and there is a mechanism set out in the Constitution for this purpose. Suspension of the Constitution is unacceptable to all parties, even those who opposed the constitution.

2. Imposing decisions of one party at the exclusion of participation in the decision-making process by other parties who are part of a coalition government. The Prime Minister applies the decisions taken by the Islamic Dawa Party (the Prime Minister’s faction) to the government. This is in violation of the Constitution and in violation of all the agreements we have. Most importantly, it is a violation of the program of the coalition government of federal Iraq.

3. Militarization of society by using the Iraqi Army for political purposes and establishing political groups armed and funded by the government. The Federal Prime Minister attempts to militarize the society and create Support Councils. In fact, these are all linked to and belong to his party. Of course, his party has the right to establish such organizations in accordance with regulations set out in the law. But they cannot be established in the name of the government and be funded and armed by the government.

4. The federal government does not rely on a law to govern the work of the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers doesn't even have an agreed upon charter, so proposals and decisions are all drafted in the Office of the Prime Minister (by leaders of the Islamic Dawa Party) first and then presented to the Council of Ministers.

5. The Federal Prime Minister keeps maintaining that he is the only one in charge of the executive branch. But this is not the case when we look at Article-66 of the Constitution which says, "The federal executive power shall consist of the President of the Republic and the Council of Ministers and shall exercise its powers in accordance with the Constitution and the law."

The Constitution has entrusted executive powers to the Council of Ministers. Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki is the head of the Council of Ministers. Important decisions must be made by the Council of Ministers headed by him. They cannot be taken by himself on behalf of the Council of Ministers. In the new Iraq, decisionmaking is not to be monopolized.

The Constitution requires the government to draft laws - to prepare bills and present them to the parliament for approval. Instead of doing this, the federal government continues to rely on old laws that gave the Revolutionary Command Council (established after the military coup in 1968 and acted as the ultimate decisionmaking body in Iraq before 2003) extraordinary legislative and executive powers, which is against the Constitution.

Relying on such laws that gave powers to the Revolutionary Command Council and the President is a return to an oppressive past that bypasses the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives (the national parliament).

The Kurdistan Regional Government is committed to the Constitution of Iraq. We are also committed to, and believe in, the principle of consensus. We respect all agreements that are in the interests of all the people of Iraq. We want democracy for all Iraq.

Iraq will remain strong when all its components are united. Iraq will progress through the strengthening of its federal foundations. It will remain a democratic country through distribution of political powers and revenues. We will continue on our march forward in providing security and peace for our people.

All this requires faith in the principle of consensus, partnership in government, and joint decisionmaking.

We reiterate that our guide to the future is the Constitution of Iraq on which we shall always rely. While the time for political niceties may well be over, we cannot – indeed, we shall not – accept anything that is contrary to the Constitution.

This article can also be found at: www.krg.org

Note: BGR Holding, LLC, has filed registration statements under the Foreign Agents Registration Act with regard to its representation and dissemination of information on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Additional information is on file with the Foreign Agents Registration Unit of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [LetterFromErbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Monday, December 15, 2008 1:17 PM
Subject: KRG strongly condemns terrorist attack in Kirkuk

KRG strongly condemns terrorist attack in Kirkuk

December 13, 2008

Statement by the Kurdistan Regional Government

Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq - KRG.org – The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) condemns in the strongest terms the despicable act of terrorism committed in Kirkuk on Thursday 11 December, the final day of the Eid holiday. This attack is an affront to humanity, to democracy and to religion.

The KRG offers its heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims who have lost their lives and wishes the survivors a speedy recovery.

The KRG has stood for tolerance and dialogue, and consider acts of terrorism abhorrent and inhumane. Such actions will not reduce our efforts to promote peace, reconstruction, development, and democracy. Rather, they serve as an incentive to rebuild and maintain order and stability.

Urgent help is needed for those individuals and families affected by this tragedy. Kirkuk is outside the KRG-administered area, however, the KRG Ministry of Health has already dispatched a medical team to Kirkuk, and all ministries have been notified that their assistance may be necessary. In addition, our hospitals are standing by and are ready to accept all victims wounded in this senseless act.

The KRG emphasises, once again, its clear and absolute condemnation of this and any act of terrorism and violence and reiterates its sympathy for the victims and their families.

This statement can also be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [LetterFromErbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, December 18, 2008 1:00 PM
Subject: President Bush meets KRG President Masoud Barzani on final visit to Iraq

President Bush meets President Barzani on final visit to Iraq

December 18, 2008

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) – President Bush met Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani in Baghdad this week on his final visit to Iraq as US President.

President Bush, who was in Iraq to sign the Status of Forces Agreement between the two countries, was first received by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. He also held meetings with Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri Maliki and Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani.

Presidents Barzani and Bush, who last met in Washington in October, discussed the situation in Iraq in general, and the relations between the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi federal government. President Bush also praised President Barzani's role in defending the political process and supporting the security agreement between Iraq and the United States of America. Both Presidents emphasised the need to solve all the outstanding problems within the framework of the Constitution. For his part, President Barzani thanked President Bush for liberating Iraq and the Kurdistan Region from dictatorship.

After signing the Status of Forces Agreement, President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki held a joint press conference. President Bush noted the improvements in Iraq while acknowledging much work still needed to be done.

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Tuesday, January 13, 2009 7:14 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani in the Los Angeles Times: The new Iraq is based upon the principle of consensus

'The new Iraq is based upon the principle of consensus'

A transcript of The Times' interview with Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani.

Los Angeles Times

January 12, 2009

By Ned Parker, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

In Sunday's paper, The Times interviewed Kurdistan region's President Massoud Barzani about the growing rift between the Kurds and Prime Minister Nouri Maliki. Below is a transcript of most of the interview.

Barzani, whose late father led multiple revolts against Baghdad in the 20th century, discusses the Kurds' differences with Maliki and his own conviction that the prime minister is drifting toward authoritarian rule. Barzani reviews in details his differences with Maliki over the the Iraqi army's current direction and a pending oil and gas law. Other topics discussed include disputed territories like Kirkuk, and a recent confrontation between Maliki's body guards and Kurdish security forces at the Iraqi parliament, that ended with Maliki's guards calling in an Iraqi army unit to seize control of the parliament building. The interview was conducted Saturday at Barzani's offices in Salahuddin, outside Irbil.

Barzani is asked about his expectations for Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's coming visit to Kurdistan.

Barzani: "I think it will be his fourth visit to the region as PM. Although the time has not been set for the visit, but of course when he does come, there are five specific issues and the issues which have been set forth that will be discussed, and they will be the key topics to be discussed with him.

"The first one will be the file of the security and the military. The second one would be partnership in government -- in other words our partnership in government. The third one is the economical one, which covers oil and gas as well. The other file would be the disputed regions. And finally the foreign affairs or foreign politics."

Barzani is asked about disagreements between Maliki and his partners in the government, including the Kurds. Have those disputes centered about concerns that the Prime Minister is trying to rule by himself and is there any progress in resolving these questions.

Barzani: "What I mentioned earlier. One of the issues that will be discussed and one of the key files is partnership in administration. Which is based on the rule by consensus among the key groups as well as commitment to the constitutional principles and what has been laid out in the constitution. Indeed, it is a big issue in Iraq."

Barzani is asked to describe the prime minister's policies.

Barzani: "We certainly have expressed our views very openly and clearly and we also have expressed our views in official correspondence with the prime minister. We have expressed that we have reservations on certain issues and they have also been made public. What we have geared, what we have aimed, is to resolve these issues through direct contact, and obviously adhering to the constitution that has laid the groundwork for

such issues."

Barzani is asked about comments he made in November on the Al Hurra satellite television channel that the Iraqi government ignores the Kurdish role whenever possible in every area and that the government wants to return to a one-party system and a totalitarian authority. He is asked to elaborate on what he meant.

Barzani: "It was earlier in November when I was interviewed by al Hurra. After that interview I visited Baghdad actually ... I stayed there for a couple of weeks. We had meetings and we presented our views and certain notes that I had mentioned earlier and the committees [that] were formed were as a result of those notes, as a result of the concerns that we had expressed openly and sometimes in private, so these committees were agreed. We had a chain of meetings – of key groups al Dawa, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, KDP [Kurdistan Democratic Party], PUK [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan] and Islamic Party of Iraq as key components or political groups, or government to government, or KRG with federal government.

"So these committees were formed in order to handle these issues, in order to resolve these pending issues which are detrimental. This is what we are proceeding with right now... The formation of the new Iraq is based upon the principle of consensus. These key groups must adhere to the constitution, to the roadmap that has been laid, as well as the principle of consensus because no single party has won elections and has come to power by absolute majority. This is through consensus and we all have to adhere. If one particular group diverts or moves away from this line and principle of consensus, obviously it creates such problems which have been [seen] more recently. We would fully support issues to be handled and to be resolved through the constitution and dialogue. This is how we've proceeded and this is what we are doing right now."

Barzani is asked if any of these new committees have made progress.

Barzani: "There has been some progress within certain committees, but maybe not that significant or tangible due to the fact that there were full concentration by all parties on the security agreement or SOFA. Everybody was concerned with that. As of now the committees have begun their work in earnest."

Barzani is asked if there has been any progress on the oil law.

Barzani: "As far as we are concerned, there is a foregone conclusion on how the oil law should be drafted, but unfortunately it seems that Baghdad is dragging its feet and not wanting an amicable solution to it. In real essence, the problems or blame are being laid at the doorsteps of the Kurds at a time when the state has no oil policy and the ministry is a failed ministry with a failed policy. And at the same time, they do not want to see any development in this field in Kurdistan as well and [are] blaming the Kurds for the failures in Baghdad. And quite contrary to that the problem is not with the Kurdistan region.

"Over the past three years, there has been a budget of eight billion dollars allocated for the [rehabilitation] of the oil industry sector in order to increase the production level, and when you look at it the production it has perhaps even decreased, rather than increased. That's what the Iraqi public has to be told. What was the reason and why [was] this budget that was allocated was not properly spent and what actually has happened to that budget and why has the oil production not met the required production level.

Barzani is asked why the money hasn't been spent properly.

Barzani: "This is what we ought to know as well, to know the reason for it, the Iraqi public need to know about it."

Barzani is asked if the reason is corruption in the oil ministry.

Barzani: "I can't prejudge that. I cannot say. It's a very important issue, that the Iraqi people need to be aware of and they need to be informed."

Barzani is asked if he feels that elements within the government or parties are trying to blame the Kurds about the oil law to distract the Iraqi public from larger political issues.

Barzani: "Until very recently, yes indeed, it was the case to blame the Kurds for any mishaps or lack of developments, whether it was [in] the prime ministry or any particular ministry where they face obstacles or problems. And they were trying to blame the Kurds for any lack of developments, which was not the case, although things have moved on a little bit now. It has improved but until very recently that [was] the case having the Kurds as a scapegoat for every misfortune."

[Asked about the negotiations on the oil law, Barzani speaks about an agreement to start shipping Kurdish oil through the Iraqi oil pipeline to Turkey, following a visit by Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Shahristani to Kurdistan in November]

"We have all agreed in principle in the constitution that oil and gas belongs to all Iraqi people and should be distributed equally and this 100,000 barrels can be part of this greater Iraqi oil production level in order to be distributed as per agreements we have reached."

Barzani is asked about his previous comments that Kurds have been marginalized in the Iraqi army

Barzani: "The very beginning after the new developments in post 2003, when there were efforts to reform and rebuild the Iraqi army, it seems that people were hesitant to join the army – neither the Sunnis nor the Shiite Arabs were joining the Iraqi army. The very first steps were taken by the Kurdish side. The very first three divisions were actually formed by Kurdish units and elements. Thereafter other people gradually joined in and volunteered to join the army. Like oil and other resources, the military is for all Iraqi people and there has to be a balance of all elements of Iraqi society to participate in the army. And of course the military should and must have its own regulations and [foundations] that it has been set up on."

"Under normal circumstances, it is very natural to move around officers and units of various types and elements to various parts of the country. Of course, looking at the situation in Iraq, it is not a normal situation. It is an abnormal situation at the moment. And in more recent times, we have witnessed there has been a deliberate attitude to marginalize and to oppose the Kurdish participation [in the army]. And there seems to be a unilateral move in order to create an army that would be more responsible to an individual, which is more alarming. First and foremost, the military should not be engaged in politics, Furthermore the military should not be engaged in settling internal disputes of this group and that group."

"I believe there are 16 divisions right now in the Iraqi army. Normally the heads of divisions have to be nominated and for the parliament to approve the nomination. But I challenge [to find] any single division head of the army that has been nominated and approved by the parliament. They have been approved on personal will [decrees], and of course this is something which is not tolerated. This is not an army ... we were hoping to create."

"We have been very flexible and we have tolerated this because we feel that we should discuss these matters and give this [newly formed] committee a chance in order to review the situation and come up with some kind of solutions [that can] be implemented. This is why we did not want to make a big deal out of it, until a final solution has been put forward and discussed and agreed [upon]. We hope that this would lead to a balanced participation in this important military. Either that [solution] has to be implemented... or [it] would be unacceptable to go in [a] direction that would be extremely difficult for us to tolerate. This is not a problem for us only as Kurds, but I believe this is a problem for all Iraqis."

Barzani is asked about cases of the army being used for politics or to resolve internal disputes between Iraqi groups

Barzani: "One of the examples is the issue of Khanaqin. And it was on the agenda to follow the same line in other areas [of sending Iraqi troops against peshmerga forces]. Once we realized that this was the case, obviously the program was foiled.

"Very recently there was a dispute between the bodyguards of the prime minister and the security of the parliament, when the prime minister was visiting the parliament. Immediately, the military was called, the military surrounded the parliament, and actually occupied the parliament. That's another example. This is quite a major event. What else can [we] expect."

Barzani is asked about in which other provinces had there been plans before the Khanaqin confrontation to send Iraqi troops to evict Kurdish forces.

Barzani: "Kirkuk, Mosul [provinces] as far as southern areas were concerned I'm not too sure, too aware."

Barzani is asked how Kurds in the military have been marginalized.

Barzani: "They have been either transferred to other units out of the region or they have been sent back to the ministry of defense".

Barzani is asked about whether Maliki is the individual he is referring to as the person who is trying to direct the Iraqi army alone.

Barzani: "The prime minister has been the [commander in chief] of the armed forces. That doesn't mean the [commander in chief] of the armed forces has the authority to do whatever he likes. The office of the [commander in chief] of the armed forces is doing things all by itself and not coordinating or working with the ministry of defense or the chief of staff nor with other various departments of the armed forces.

"And of course, why should we blame the situation only on one person, of course other institutions are to be blamed, such as the presidency council, the parliament itself and the council of ministers. How can they tolerate this? I think they should have a say in this matter as well."

Barzani is asked about allegations made by Maliki at a November 20 press conference that Kurdish forces had been involved in illegal arrests and tortures?

Barzani: "First I think it was a big mistake for him to make such a statement and unfortunately he had gone against the grain of this solid traditional relationship that we had with him and his group in the past. Perhaps there are two reasons for that kind of attitude. First perhaps he may well have been misinformed by groups or individuals who were actually trying to create some kind of animosity. The second reason may well have been to attract and to gain some support of some chauvinistic elements and individuals. But adopting that position he did not calculate ... who exactly he would be losing."

Barzani is asked if the two have spoken since Maliki's press conference.

Barzani: "We have expressed our official view in the response. The letter. After that letter that was sent out to him, I have not met with him nor spoken to him. I had visited Baghdad for a couple of hours when President Bush was visiting Baghdad, but it was not for a meeting with the prime minister."

Barzani is asked about times when he backed Maliki when others wanted to force the prime minister from office.

Barzani: "You are right. It was in April 2007. When we felt there was a serious effort to remove him from his seat. We felt what was behind it, was not well intended. It was people of sinister intention with a sinister agenda, It was not for the benefit of Iraq in general and neither for the Kurds in particular. Toward the end of April 2007, the 26th or 27th of April, there was a gathering of various Iraqi groups under the auspices of various intelligence groups of regional countries, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi, Turkey and the Emirates. I think there were six countries in total, who had organized this gathering of certain Iraqi groups and the whole idea was to undermine the situation, and we were alarmed by this. This is why we fully supported [Maliki's] position because we felt this was first and foremost against Iraq. It was a very direct and sinister intervention in Iraqi affairs though intelligence apparatuses of these countries. We felt alarmed by it and this is why we moved on it and we supported obviously the PM. We felt it was against the Iraqi people, against Iraq and against the Kurdish people. That led to this four-party coalition, which was later extended to five [a consultative body grouping Barzani, the Iraqi presidency council and Maliki]."

Barzani is asked about a plot to topple Maliki last spring during his military campaign in Basra, and if he rallied to Maliki's side then as well.

Barzani: "When he embarked on this operation, I phoned him ... I told him I fully support you in every way and if need be I can dispatch military units to help you with this operation. Indeed, we were serious in our intervention and sincerity."

Again Barzani is asked there was an effort to unseat Maliki by some groups during the Basra military campaign.

Barzani: "Indeed that was the case. There were intentions to unseat him, but the way to remove him and the [motives] behind the removal were not well intended. Still I am not for any such measures to unseat him, or to even remove any single government official or police officer from his position through the sinister efforts of regional intelligence apparatuses. I don't support that."

Barzani is asked if he feels Maliki has forgotten what the Kurds have done for him and the way the Kurds have been a good partner for Iraq.

Barzani: "Unfortunately, he seems to have forgotten it. Not only recently but even the relations we had in the 1980s and what we had offered him then. We had very close contact and provided support for his group, the Dawa party."

Barzani is asked why Maliki has forgotten the past.

Barzani: "We want to know. It is also a surprise for us. In Arabic there is a saying that absolute authority could lead to an individual losing insight or bearing. In other words, his character would be lost in absolute authority."

Barzani is asked if he is saying this is what has happened to Maliki.

Barzani: Unfortunately, we are disappointed. This is the reality. It is a very sad reality. We are disappointed. My expectations were that even in my absence somebody like Maliki would be defending the rights of the Kurds in any gathering or platforms. I never expected that he would be opposing the rights of the Kurdish people nor he would be opposing the existence of peshmerga units or peshmergas or Kurds within the Iraqi army and he would be marginalizing them. Unfortunately, this is what is happening and we are disappointed by that. To elaborate on the earlier [point], one gets lost in absolute authority. You become too authoritarian, you lose yourself."

Barzani is asked to describe his last conversation with Maliki.

Barzani: "On a personal level he is a good close friend of mine. And in fact, when I get to see him, I tell him far more face to face rather than what I say publicly. So I'm very open and very frank with him. In the media, I try to consider his situation and not to be so rigid."

Barzani is asked to describe their recent conversations.

Barzani: "Just to conclude on that, we have this dispute. It is very clear. We have identified the areas. These committees have been formed upon agreement of all parties concerned and we are waiting for the outcome of their work. We don't want to exacerbate the situation further. We certainly want to concentrate on the work of the committees. Hopefully they will come out with some agreements which will be amicable, pragmatic and practical."

Barzani is asked whether there is a solution for Kirkuk through the UN beyond the referendum called for in the Iraqi constitution's article 140. The UN has advocated alternative ideas, including Iraqi political factions coming to a consensus on what areas might be annexed to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Barzani: "The reason we had agreed as the Kurdistan region to remain within the state of Iraq is so long as Iraq is in possession of such a constitution and so long as they adhere to this constitution. The disputed areas are far more important than has been given credit. It is historical issue for us and if you look at the more recent history of the Kurdish confrontations or movements against successive and various Iraqi regimes [they] were all over these disputed areas. There were aggressions against the Kurds and unfortunately there has been a lot of unfortunate and unkind treatment of the Kurds historically on this issue. Article 140 is a constitutional article and it has given a roadmap for a solution to the issue."

"We cannot afford to lose time and to come back to new proposals every day. The constitution is very clear. The constitution was voted by 80 percent or more of the Iraqi population. The constitution is a package. One cannot be selective in taking a part of it out ... Therefore it should be comprehensive. There has to be efforts to fully implement the constitution. Those who oppose any article of the constitution should have opposed voting for it in the referendum [on the constitution in 2005]. Now that it has been voted for, therefore, it has to be respected. And you cannot be selective and you cannot allow individuals or groups to take a part of it out and to stand against it and to support other parts of the constitution... No alternative to article 140 would be acceptable."

Barzani is asked does this mean he thinks there has to be a referendum on the disputed territories.

Barzani: "Normalization, census and referendum. Whatever the people decide then it should be respected."

Barzani is asked about a recent comment by Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih that there were attempts to take political and social problems in Baghdad to provoke an Arab-Kurdish conflict.

Barzani: "As far as full-scale and all-out Arab-Kurdish conflict, this is impossible because we will not tolerate and we will not accept such a conflict between the two communities, the two people. Throughout our history, we have not had any animosity or any move against the Arabs as a people, and we will never do that, and the Arab people in its entirety, the majority of it have been sympathetic to us and in support of us, the dispute is with the political forces."

"But if an individual or the head of a tribe or clan tries to enter such a conflict and turn the conflict into a Kurdish-Arab conflict then he will be confronted by all people and I think he will be the loser. If he tries to drag

the entire Arab population to this, I think he will fail. It has not crossed our minds to settle problems through violence. We strongly believe in the constitution, we believe in dialogue, if somebody or individual groups consider using force, then of course, we have the capabilities to stand against it...

"In the last few years almost 2,000 Kurds have been killed in Mosul. ... We have not responded in the same manner and we have not reacted in any act of vengeance, but of course everything will have its limits."

Barzani is asked if he thinks Maliki can really change his behavior, via the committees set up to broker compromise.

Barzani: "I think we have discussed a lot about the prime minister so we want to go on."

Barzani is asked about a meeting in December of major political leaders in northern Iraq that some media reports described as a meeting to plot Maliki's ouster. The gathering included Barzani, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and vice presidents Tariq Hashimi and Adel Abdul Mehdi.

Barzani: "In fact, the gathering was purely social because of the feast [the Muslim holiday Eid al Adha] that had taken place, so we gathered there. Issues of all aspects, in general issues were discussed. On the issue that you mentioned, under no circumstances, this was discussed replacing him... There was no discussion about replacing him. Discussions were only in general terms about reconciliation and political reforms that should take place and to also activate the committees that have been set up."

Barzani is asked again whether there have been any discussions at all among senior Iraqi leaders about replacing Maliki.

Barzani: "There hasn't been any discussion on his removal at all in the meeting in Dokan [Sulaymaniya]... That was the last meeting [of Iraq's senior political leaders] in Dokan."

Barzani is asked whether Iraqi Kurdistan will always remain part of Iraq.

Barzani: "So long as Iraq is in possession of such a constitution and adheres to such a constitution, Kurdistan will be part of Iraq."

Barzani is asked what the Kurds would do then if Iraq does not remain loyal to the constitution.

Barzani: "That's the bridge we will have to cross when we come [to] it. Even in the preamble of the constitution, it says very clearly adherence to this constitution is a precondition to preserving the unity of Iraq. For sure, we will not accept an Iraq ruled by dictatorship."

Barzani is asked if he is optimistic about the country's future and challenges facing the country in the coming years.

Barzani: "In our position, one always has to be optimistic. Terrorism, and secular disputes and confrontations and of course rule of the state, the culture of democracy has to be promoted and deeply rooted."

This interview can be found at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fgw-transcript12-2009jan12,0,2173247.story>

This interview can also be found at: www.krg.org

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This article can be found at: www.kirk.org

In all his meetings with the different communities, President Barzani stressed the need for more tolerance and peaceful co-existence for different religious and ethnic groups. He urged that his tradition should be upheld. Friendship between different religious and ethnic communities. He said Mosul has historically been a place of

Kurds were not behind those attacks.”

On accusations that the Kurds were behind last year's targeted attacks against Christians in Mosul, President Barzani said, “Some people blamed the Kurds for these attacks, but it has become clear to everyone that the

President said. The President also remarked that all Iraqis, sacrifices and struggles have been for a day so any particular side; you have the right to vote for your own candidates. You should vote with your conscience,” Kurdish Region in May and general elections at the end of this year. “We are not here to ask you to vote for that they, as a people, can freely cast their votes and elect their own government.

Provincial Council elections due to be held on 31 January 2009, the Provincial Council elections in the Kurdish Region in May and general elections at the end of this year. “We are not here to ask you to vote for

In this gathering, President Barzani noted that 2009 is year for important elections. He referred to the upcoming

On Friday the President sat with representatives of Shabak Kurds and Christians from the Mosul area. Christians and Shabaks have been the target of attacks by extremists and Al-Qaeda terrorists in Mosul recently, and many have fled and resettled in the Kurdistan Region in recent months.

On Thursday, the President visited the Sheikhan district, which is home to a large number of Yezidis. In a communal gathering with Yezidis that included their religious leaders, President Barzani noted that despite the fact that Yezidis are considered ethnic Kurds, no one has to right to determine the identity of the Yezidis. “Only Yezidis themselves can determine their ethnic or religious identity,” the President remarked. Sheikhan with a mixed population of Yezidis, Christians and Muslims, is a district north of Mosul. Sheikhan also visited the Lalish centre, the Yezidi's principal holy site which is situated in Sheikhan.

Duhok and Zakho over the last few days to meet with representatives from the Yezidi, Shabak, and Christian communities, as well as displaced Kurds from Mosul and its surrounding districts.

President Barzani to Yezidis, Shabaks, Christians: ‘Only you can determine your identity’

January 25, 2009

From: **Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]**
 Subject: **KRG President Masoud Barzani meets with Yezidi, Shabak, and Christian communities**
 Sent: **Monday, January 26, 2009 5:11 PM**
 KRG President Masoud Barzani meets with Yezidi, Shabak, and Christian communities

Letter From Erbil

Agents Registration Unit of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC
dissemination of information on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Additional information is on file with the Foreign
Note: BGR Group has filed registration statements under the Foreign Agents Registration Act with regard to its representation and

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

As a symbol of friendship and appreciation for his role in Iraq, President Barzani awarded the Ambassador with a medal engraved with the emblem of the Kurdistan Region Presidency.

President Barzani talked about the sacrifices of the people of the Region. "Although our sacrifices far outweigh what we have achieved, our people are pleased with the new Iraq and we will continue to work for the building of a federal, democratic Iraq. We will defend the democratic process in Iraq and we will stand in the way of any efforts to return Iraq to dictatorship," President Barzani added. He also reiterated the Kurdistan Region's commitment to the Iraqi Constitution.

For his part, President Barzani praised the US Ambassador's role in Iraq and expressed his happiness with the relations that have developed between the Kurdistan Region and the United States of America. The President hoped that this friendship would continue beyond his departure from Iraq.

Ambassador Crocker thanked President Barzani and the people of Kurdistan Region for their cooperation. He noted that Iraq has come a long way since he started his work as US Ambassador to Iraq. Mr Crocker arrived in Baghdad in March 2007.

Region President Masoud Barzani and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani as the Ambassador nears the completion of his tenure in Iraq.

Erbil, Kurdistan Region – Iraq (KRP.org) – United States Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker visited Kurdistan

January 27, 2009

US Ambassador Crocker meets Kurdistan Region's leadership in Erbil

Subject:

From:

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From:

To:

Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]

US Ambassador Crocker meets Kurdistan Region's leadership in Erbil

PM

5:14

PM

January 27, 2009

Letter From Erbil

This article can be found at: www.kirp.org

"We have all witnessed the fate of one-party rule in Iraq. We believe that in a country that is made up of several communities, a federal system is the best solution," the President continued. He called for the opening of a new chapter and said "let us resolve our differences based on the Constitution and Article 140."

President Barzani also said that it is neither his policy nor President Talabani's policy to marginalise or sideline any community. Certain calls for the expelling of Kurds have been the main source of tensions in Kirkuk, the President said.

"Kirkuk has been the main sticking point between us and successive Iraqi governments. Kirkuk must become an example for the rest of Iraq for co-existence and tolerance. Preserving fraternity between Arabs and Kurds is a principle that we will never forget," said President Barzani.

Later in the meeting, President Barzani noted that a solution to Kirkuk will be a key to the resolution of many other outstanding issues.

He had vowed to work for a power-sharing solution for the administration of Kirkuk. President Talabani recently visited Kirkuk and held extended meetings with different communities in the city.

President Masoud Barzani thanked the delegation for their comments and suggestions. He described the meeting as "very important" and said that he is fully behind the pledges that they have received from Iraqi President Talabani.

The deputy governor, and several members of the delegation, also called for the implementation of a power-sharing formula for the administration of Kirkuk. They hoped that with more dialogue and engagement, as well as the implementation of the Iraqi constitution, all problems in Kirkuk can be resolved.

Rakan Saeed Al-Jaboori, the deputy governor of Kirkuk, described this meeting as a golden opportunity for obtaining consensus among all the different ethnic and religious communities of Kirkuk," said Al-Jaboori.

Kirkuk and surrounding areas to look for ways to ease tensions and remove any misunderstandings between the Kurdish Region President Barzani met a number of Arab officials and Arab tribal leaders from different communities in the city.

President Barzani to Kirkuk's Arab representatives: Kirkuk must become an example for co-existence and tolerance

January 28, 2009

and tolerance

Subject: Kurdish Region President Barzani meets with Kirkuk's Arab representatives
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2009 5:38 PM
From: Letter From Ebil [letterfromebil@kurdistantoday.net]
KRG President Masoud Barzani meets with Kirkuk's Arab representatives

Letter From Ebil

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Monday, February 02, 2009 10:00 AM
Subject: Statement by the Kurdistan Regional Government on Provincial Elections in Iraq

KRG statement on provincial elections

January 31, 2009

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) conveys its strong support for the provincial election process currently underway in 14 governorates across the Federal Republic of Iraq. The KRG has always been a steadfast proponent of democracy and the Iraqi Constitutional process, and welcomes the expression of political views through the elections.

Although there are no elections scheduled in the three KRG governorates and Kirkuk, the KRG supports all citizens who are voting today and is facilitating the voting process for those displaced individuals currently residing within the Region but casting absentee ballots for their original districts. In Suleimaniah, Erbil, and Dohuk there are 15, 23, and 33 voting centres, respectively.

As we watch some political candidates peacefully replace others in office, the KRG hopes that the spirit of fairness and democratic representation will be a precedent for future elections.

Unfortunately, the KRG notes its great concern that thousands of Kurds in Ninewah, Makhmour and Khanaqeen were unable to exercise their right to vote due to a logistical mix-up by the Independent Electoral Commission.

The KRG looks forward to working with elected provincial leaders, as we have in the past. We consider this election to be a positive sign for Iraq as it continues on a path towards peaceful coexistence and federal democracy.

This statement can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2009 11:52 AM
Subject: KRG Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir in the Wall Street Journal: Kurds Will Help Preserve U.S. Work, Sacrifice in Iraq

Kurds Will Help Preserve U.S. Work, Sacrifice in Iraq

The Wall Street Journal

Letters

February 5, 2009

Your editorial "Obama and Iraq" (Jan. 27) highlights many factors regarding the U.S. strategy in Iraq but neglects to mention the role of the Kurds. Within Iraq, the Kurds have been America's strongest ally in both Iraq's liberation from Saddam Hussein and in the democratic transition after the fall of the previous regime. Our peshmerga forces have fought and died alongside U.S. soldiers combating terrorists in Iraq. The Kurds deeply appreciate what the U.S. has done by ridding Iraq of a regime that employed chemical weapons against us and that was responsible for the death or disappearance of more than 180,000 Kurds.

The autonomous Kurdistan Region is a model for the rest of the country with respect to our culture of tolerance and our commitment to good governance. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is also unwavering in its support for federalism and the Iraqi constitutional process. We are also concerned about any possible trends that seek to accentuate tensions between Arabs and Kurds, whether in Mosul, Kirkuk, Diyala or elsewhere.

The KRG agrees that the drawdown of U.S. forces must be responsible, and driven more by conditions inside Iraq rather than by a timetable. The gains in Iraq over the past year have been substantial, but the politics remain fragile, especially following the provincial elections held on Jan. 31. We still must navigate the referendum on the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement to take place late this summer, and parliamentary elections to be held by the end of 2009. Should there be a U.S. redeployment in Iraq, the KRG is fully committed to working as a partner with the U.S. to ensure security and stability in Iraq.

Falah Mustafa Bakir
Erbil, Kurdistan Region
Iraq

Minister Bakir is head of the Department of Foreign Relations for the Kurdistan Regional Government.

This article can be found at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123381045270351335.html>

This article can also be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2009 6:02 PM
Subject: US Chamber of Commerce seeks business opportunities in visit to Kurdistan Region

US Chamber of Commerce seeks business opportunities in visit to Kurdistan Region

February 5, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) - The US Chamber of Commerce is conducting a five-day visit to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq this week. The delegation includes American businessmen in many fields looking to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq for mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities.

Security and economic growth have allowed the Kurdistan Region in Iraq to credibly engage international business partners in several key sectors. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani has taken considerable steps to improve transparency, boost the capacity of local industry, and improve infrastructure to make the Region fertile for foreign direct investment.

Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations, welcomed the delegation at a gala dinner at Martyr Saad Abdulla Convention Centre. “The Kurdistan Region is open for business. We in the Kurdistan Region and throughout Iraq are looking ahead as we rebuild our economy and infrastructure.” He added, “So I invite American firms to help us bring forth a bright and prosperous future here in the Kurdistan Region, as a gateway to the rest of Iraq.”

Ambassador Marc Wall, Counselor Minister of the office of Economic Transition Initiatives at the US Embassy in Baghdad, was the keynote speaker. He said that Iraq needs a strong private sector, which in any society is a source of prosperity, sustainable employment and the delivery of goods and services.

Mr Qubad Talabany, the KRG Representative to the US, accompanied the delegation. He said, “This is another indicator of the increasing level of cooperation between the US Government, the US private sector, and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. I am particularly pleased that the US Embassy sent Ambassador Wall to the Kurdistan Region to accompany this important business delegation.”

The visit was organised by the US Chamber of Commerce’s Kurdistan Region in Iraq Investment Task Force, in coordination with the Kurdistan Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Mr Aram Zamgochian, of the US Chamber’s Task Force, urged American businesses to move beyond discussion and towards action and implementation in the Kurdistan Region.

The gala dinner was attended by KRG officials, US Chamber of Commerce and Erbil Chamber of Commerce representatives, foreign diplomatic representatives, local and international firms, and senior US diplomatic and reconstruction officials based in Baghdad and Erbil.

The delegation will also visit Suleimaniah, and is meeting with the governorate’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry, government officials and local business leaders.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

Note: BGR Group has filed registration statements under the Foreign Agents Registration Act with regard to its representation and dissemination of information on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Additional information is on file with the Foreign Agents Registration Unit of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC

Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2009 2:21 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani visits Kuwait and Qatar, signs MOU

President Barzani concludes visit to Kuwait, arrives in Qatar

February 10, 2009

Qatar – (KRG.org) - Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani is completing an official visit to Kuwait and Qatar as the Kurdistan Region continues to pursue mutually beneficial relationships with countries throughout the Middle East.

President Barzani met with Kuwait's President Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister Jabir Mubarek al-Hamad al-Sabah, and Crown Prince Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah, as well as several Kuwaiti business people.

President Barzani discussed the relationship between Kuwait and Iraq and emphasised the expansion of investment and private sector opportunities in the Kurdistan Region. He welcomed Kuwaiti companies to explore commercial and investment ventures in the Region.

Mr Barzani also met several ambassadors from Arab countries to Kuwait, with whom he discussed political affairs. He said, “From our own experience and the experience of many other people, a federal system is the best solution for Iraq.”

President Barzani was received in Qatar by Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabir al-Thani. A number of Qatari ministers also attended the meeting.

Kurdistan Regional Government and Qatar sign MOU

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed on Sunday between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Qatar covering cooperation on infrastructure, agricultural development, agricultural investment, tourism and air transport.

The memorandum also refers to the possibility of opening diplomatic offices in both Qatar and the Kurdistan Region as part of plans to develop diplomatic and trade ties.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, February 12, 2009 1:32 PM
Subject: Carnegie Endowment report urges more US support for federalism in Iraq

Carnege Endowment for peace urges more US support for federalism in Iraq

Panelists agree that improving Turkish-KRG relations, settling disputed territories are imperatives

February 11, 2009

Washington DC, US (KRG.org) – The Kurdistan Regional Government's Representative to the US said yesterday that his government and Turkey should work closer together on political, economic and energy issues to increase regional stability.

Speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a leading think tank in Washington, Mr Qubad Talabani said, "There are vast energy resources in Iraqi Kurdistan that can benefit both the Kurdistan Region and Turkey".

Mr Talabani was speaking at the Carnegie Endowment's unvciling of its new report Preventing Conflict over Kurdistan. Dr Barkey, the report's author and a Senior Associate of Carnegie's Middle East Programme, spoke at the launch with Mr Talabani and other panelists.

Mr Barkey said that for the US to disengage from Iraq, first it would have to play a leading role in strengthening relations between the Kurdistan Region, Baghdad and Turkey. The report recommends, "A new administration has to manage the Kurdish questions as a critical element of its Iraq disengagement policy... Washington must pay close attention to the many intertwined dimensions of the Kurdish question."

The report also states that the priorities are to strengthen federalism in Iraq, and peacefully resolve the issue of Kirkuk and other disputed territories while at the same time building on improvements in relations between the KRG and Turkey. "Washington must develop a comprehensive approach that recognises and, where possible, leverages those linkages to help usher in a stable and prosperous future" Dr Barkey added.

He called for a special US coordinator to address the outstanding issues and break down bureaucratic barriers that currently exist within the various US government agencies.

The reduction in tensions between Turkey and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq has been a key achievement of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, and the KRG is confident that relations will continue to improve in the months and years ahead.

Mr Talabani noted that one year ago Turkish troops massed on the Iraqi border primed to invade, but today tensions between both sides have subsided and talks are ongoing. Simultaneously, Turkish businesses continue to be by far the largest investors in the Kurdistan Region, putting Turkey in the premier spot to reap more economic gains once federalism is fully implemented in Iraq.

But he warned, "Federalism has to be more than just a concept, and must be institutionalised. That also means complete implementation of natural resources and revenue sharing policies, and resolving the issue of disputed territories per the constitution of the country."

Mr Talabani welcomed the report's recommendation of a more intense, better coordinated US role in the Kurdistan Region. He urged the US to quickly raise its government operations there to full consular status. He said, "The [US] influence in commerce and development of civil society is immeasurable".

On the panel with Dr Barkey and Mr Talabani were Dr Ian Lesser, Senior Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund, and Dr Marina Ottaway, Director of the Carnegie Middle East Programme.

A PDF of the report is available at the Carnegie Endowment website:
http://carnegieendowment.org/files/preventing_conflict_kurdistan.pdf

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2009 1:41 PM
Subject: German Foreign Minister opens consulate in first trip to Kurdistan Region; Speech by KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani

German Foreign Minister opens consulate in first trip to Kurdistan Region

February 18, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) – German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier made a landmark visit to Erbil today to mark the inauguration of Germany's Consulate General to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

Germany is one of 13 nations with diplomatic representation in the Kurdistan Region, four of which now have full consulates general.

Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani received Dr Steinmeier, Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zibari, and their accompanying delegations at the airport in Erbil.

President Masoud Barzani, the Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament Adnan Mufti, Prime Minister Barzani, and senior Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials met Foreign Minister Steinmeier and his delegation.

President Barzani said, "We are very pleased by this historic visit and invite Germany to participate in rebuilding the Region." Regarding the situation in Iraq, he added, "We have continually promoted the development of Iraq, based on democracy and the rule of law."

Dr Steinmeier was pleased by the vast reconstruction under way in the Kurdistan Region, and appreciated President Barzani's invitation to contribute to those efforts.

Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani addressed guests at the opening of the Consulate General. Dr Steinmeier stressed the potential that exists for strengthened cooperation between the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and Germany.

Prime Minister Barzani said, "We commend the German government for opening its Consulate General in the Kurdistan Region." He added, "We hope that you return with a positive impression and are able to discuss the stability and peace in the Region with your colleagues in the European Union, so that other countries are encouraged to come to the Kurdistan Region for the same purpose."

Prime Minister Barzani has been actively promoting stronger ties and mutually beneficial relationships with members of the international community.

Accompanying members of the German delegation, which included representatives of leading firms such as Siemens and MAN, met with KRG ministers and officials to discuss opportunities in several areas, including health and electricity.

Dr Dilshad Abdulrahman, the Minister for Education, took the delegation on a tour of the elementary Gara Typical School, a partnership school in which the German language is taught. Students welcomed the guests with German songs, and Dr Abdulrahman and Dr Steinmeier addressed the audience.

The delegation completed its itinerary with a visit to AGEF a German nongovernmental organisation that promotes social, economic and democratic development, with a particular focus on capacity building.

Prime Minister's speech at opening of German Consulate General

February 19, 2009

Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

Good afternoon and welcome to you all. On behalf of the people and the government of the Kurdistan Region, I would like to offer a very warm welcome to the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, His Excellency Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and to the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Iraq, His Excellency Hoshyar Zibari, and their accompanying delegations.

I am pleased and privileged to be here with you today to participate in the official opening of the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Kurdistan Region. Today is an historic day and marks the start of a new era in our relations.

Germany has a strong global reputation in the fields of industry, commerce and development, and is an effective member of the European Union. Germany also has a long history with the peoples of the region.

We in the Kurdistan Regional Government have worked hard to establish friendships and build bridges with members of the international community. Germany has been among our very important partners.

The opening of this Consulate today in the Kurdistan Region is a most encouraging sign to strengthen our relations. This step comes after the important changes that have occurred in Iraq – the transition from dictatorship and one-party rule to a federal and democratic Iraq; an Iraq that is governed by the Constitution.

We in the KRG are committed to the Constitution for which the people of Iraq have voted. And we will work closely with the main Iraqi parties to build a country that achieves the dreams of all.

We understand the desire of the government and private companies of Germany to participate at a variety of levels within the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. The Goethe Institute for culture has opened a Dialogue Centre in Erbil. German contributions in the sector of education have been very much appreciated as well.

German companies have long had a presence in the Region, and German business delegations have been active participants in the trade fairs in the Kurdistan Region.

I deem it necessary to briefly highlight the history of the Kurdistan Region under the rule of the former dictatorial regime. And at the same time I want to point out the freedom that Federal Iraq enjoys today. I would also like to discuss the KRG vision for the future.

The history of our people has been one of oppression and systematic violations of the most basic human rights. We have suffered genocide at the hands of the brutal Ba'ath regime. In order to foster recognition of the mass killing that has been committed, later this year we will sponsor an academic conference in Brussels regarding the genocide against our people.

The history of this crime is not that distant. Twenty years ago, and in front of the eyes of the entire world, our people suffered ethnic cleansing, mass killing, and the deployment of chemical weapons against them. Unfortunately the international community, at that time, was not ready to come to our aid in order to put an end

to the genocidal campaign against the people of the Kurdistan Region.

Today is an opportunity for all those who call for the protection of human rights and freedom to come to the support of oppressed people. We believe that the European Union, as a humanitarian matter of conscience, cannot turn a blind eye to the crimes that were committed against our people.

And I hope that the European Parliament will issue a resolution recognising the crime of genocide against our people, with a view to preventing such a crime from ever occurring again. We in the KRG appreciate the fact that the Iraqi Council of Representatives already has passed such a resolution recognising this crime as genocide. Here I would like to once again thank members of the Iraqi Parliament for this noble position in supporting truth and justice and condemning this crime.

We in the government have scaled up our cooperation with the private sector. Our citizens can see and recognise an improvement in living conditions and services. And though we still have more to do, our Region is developing and flourishing.

On this occasion I invite our guests today to become involved in our process of reconstruction and rebuilding. And I would invite you to cooperate with us, and to return home and spread the word that the Kurdistan Region can act as a gateway to Federal Iraq and is open for business.

We in the KRG continue to cooperate with the Federal Republic of Iraq, in pursuit of a democratic, federal, pluralistic state based on the Constitution and the rule of law.

Respect for the rule of law and principles guaranteed in the Constitution are prerequisites for any genuine democracy. We will continue to work in a spirit of cooperation and fraternity, and we will promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

Indeed the principles of peaceful coexistence and the culture of tolerance have made the Kurdistan Region a safe haven and have inspired the displaced; particularly our Christian brothers and sisters, to find refuge here. We have done whatever possible to help and support minorities.

And in the Kurdistan Region the Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans and Arabs – whether Muslim, Christian or Yezidi – from different ethnicities and religions, all live together in peace. This is a success that we cherish deeply.

We are very pleased by the visit of His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Germany, along with his accompanying delegation. We commend the German government for opening their Consulate General in the Kurdistan Region.

And we hope that you return with a positive impression and are able to discuss the stability and peace in the Region with your colleagues in the European Union, so that other countries are encouraged to come to the Kurdistan Region for the same purpose.

This step is a turning point to further develop and strengthen relations between the Kurdistan Region, as a part of Iraq, and Germany.

We hope that this initiative will help to reduce the obstacles European citizens face when travelling to the Kurdistan Region, such as travel advisory restrictions.

We thank the German Embassy in Iraq for their continued efforts in promoting relations between both countries, Iraq and Germany.

I would also like to thank the Embassy Office of Germany in the Kurdistan Region, which has worked very hard to improve relations. I commend you for your efforts.

I would also like to thank France for recently deciding to upgrade their presence from embassy office to consulate. I would also like to thank those countries who had earlier decided to open their consulates, such as Iran and the Russian Federation.

I assure you that the Kurdistan Regional Government is ready to provide every kind of coordination and cooperation necessary for the German Consulate General, and we wish you much success.

Thank you very much.

This speech and article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, February 27, 2009 3:14 PM
Subject: Iraqi President Talabani and KRG Prime Minister Barzani hold successful talks with South Korea

President Talabani and PM Barzani hold successful talks with South Korea

February 27, 2009

Seoul, South Korea. KRG.org – Iraq’s President Jalal Talabani and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani met this week with South Korea’s President Lee Myung-bak in Seoul to discuss strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries.

This is the first visit of an Iraqi president since the two countries established diplomatic ties. The Iraqi delegation, which included several federal and regional ministers, also discussed strengthening political, commercial and cultural exchanges with South Korea.

In talks with President Lee Myung-Bak, President Talabani said that Iraq is a rich country that values good relations with South Korea and cooperation in energy and infrastructure. He valued the contribution of the Korean Government and military to the liberation of Iraq and their assistance in reconstruction efforts. The President called upon Korean companies to start business in Iraq and offered his country’s full support.

Prime Minister Barzani noted the Korean Zaytun Division’s reconstruction projects and its successful integration with the Kurdish community while based in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Region. The Prime Minister also thanked KOICA, the Korean government’s development agency, for its assistance package and help in strengthening the capacity of Kurdistan Regional Government civil servants.

Prime Minister Barzani said, “We already have a strong relationship with Korea due to its role in the liberation of Iraq, and this visit is another step forward in strengthening our friendship. We look forward to continued and increased Korean involvement in infrastructure projects in the Kurdistan Region and throughout Iraq.”

During the four-day visit Iraq and South Korea signed a MOU on oil-for-infrastructure development. In addition, Seoul’s Incheon International Airport and Erbil International Airport agreed to the terms of a 31.5 million dollar service agreement, with the Korean side providing training and management expertise.

Prime Minister Barzani and other members of the delegation visited the plants of SK Energy, Hyundai Heavy Industries and POSCO’s southeastern industrial complex. Korea’s leading business associations, including the KNOC and KOGAS, hosted events at which the country’s leading construction, energy and infrastructure companies had the opportunity to meet the Iraqi leaders.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 04, 2009 6:38 PM
Subject: KRG President Barzani arrives in Germany to meet Chancellor Angela Merkel

President Barzani arrives in Germany to meet Chancellor Angela Merkel after Italy visit

March 4, 2009

Berlin, Germany (KRG.org) – Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani arrived in Germany today to hold meetings with Chancellor Angela Merkel, the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and other senior officials.

Foreign Minister Steinmeier visited the Kurdistan Region last month to open the Consulate General in the capital, Erbil.

President Barzani is on the second stage of his European tour. Earlier this week in Rome, he met Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

President Barzani has been active in pursuing stronger relationships with the international community, recently completing a trip to Qatar and Kuwait. He will continue his European tour with a visit the United Kingdom. He said, “The Kurdistan Region has much to gain from developing friendships with European nations in a wide variety of fields and economic sectors, and I look forward to a closer partnership with countries such as Italy.”

Prime Minister Berlusconi and President Barzani discussed a number of issues, focusing on opportunities for mutually beneficial economic cooperation and the improved relations between the Kurdistan Region and neighbouring states.

Pope Benedict praised the Kurdistan Region’s commitment to tolerance and peaceful coexistence. President Barzani extended to the Pope an invitation to visit the Region. President Barzani was accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Dr Fuad Hussein; Kurdistan Regional Government Minister for Finance Mr Sarkis Aghajan, who in 2006 was knighted by Pope Benedict for his services to the Christian community in Iraq; and Iraq’s Ambassador to the Vatican.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2009 4:58 PM
Subject: KRG President Barzani, UK Foreign Secretary Miliband discuss strengthening bilateral relations

President Barzani, Foreign Secretary Miliband discuss strengthening bilateral relations

March 12, 2009

London, UK (KRP.org) - Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani concluded his visit to the UK after holding several meetings with British government officials in London.

In this official visit, the President met Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, at Buckingham Palace. During their conversation, President Barzani asked the Prince to pay a visit to the Kurdistan Region. Prince Andrew replied that he hopes to visit the Region and several other places in Iraq in the future.

On Tuesday, 10 March 2009, President Barzani visited the UK Foreign and Commonwealth office and was warmly received by David Miliband, the UK Foreign Secretary.

The President and Foreign Secretary discussed a number of issues of common interest, including relations between Iraq and the UK. The two also reviewed the recent political and security developments in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, and the successful holding of the recent provincial elections in Iraq. President Barzani noted that regional parliamentary and provincial elections are also scheduled in the Kurdistan Region for the middle of this year.

Mr Miliband said that the UK is committed to supporting the Kurdistan Region and strengthening bilateral relations. The UK is planning to open a diplomatic representation office in the Kurdistan Region.

President Barzani also held a meeting with John Hutton, the Secretary of State for Defence, to review security developments in Iraq and the scheduled withdrawal of British forces from southern Iraq.

The President visited the UK Parliament on Thursday and met with a number of British parliament members (MPs) including with the chair and members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group. The group promotes friendship and understanding between the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Great Britain and encourages the development of democratic institutions in the Kurdistan Region as part of the democratic and federal process in the wider Iraq.

This official visit to the UK follows President Barzani's visit to Germany and Rome where he met German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and his Excellency the Pope.

This article can be found at: www.krp.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2009 3:29 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani's interview with the Financial Times

Kurds look anxiously for reconciliation

Financial Times

By Roula Khalaf, Middle East Editor

March 12, 2009

As the US prepares to wind down its military presence in Iraq, the goal of national reconciliation, the only real guarantee of future stability, remains elusive, warns Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish Regional Government.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 delivered a life-long dream for the Kurdish community. Since the war, Kurds have enjoyed a long sought after autonomy in the north of the country and have avoided much of the sectarian bloodshed that tore apart the rest of Iraqi society.

But as the 63-year-old Mr Barzani (pictured below) acknowledges, the Kurds, who make up 20 per cent of Iraq's population, will have to fend for themselves. They will have to protect cherished gains and, most importantly, prevent simmering disputes with their Arab brethren from igniting a new chapter of sectarian violence.

"It was expected that the day will come for the Americans to leave and it's the job of Iraqis – Arabs and Kurds – to work together to put their house in order," says the Kurdish leader who struggled against Saddam Hussein's regime.

Violence in Iraq dramatically diminished as the number of US troops temporarily surged, Sunni Arab tribes turned against the extremists of al-Qaeda and the Shia-led government reined in radical militias.

But the gains remain fragile, as highlighted by this week's spate of suicide bombings. And Iraq's three main communities have yet to learn to co-exist successfully.

"We still have a way to go," he tells the Financial Times in an interview during a London visit. "It's not enough for us to talk about things on the surface. We need genuine reconciliation, a real government of power sharing based on partnership, and not to have whoever is there impose his will."

Even former Ba'athists – purged from the administration in the postwar era, many of them forced to leave the country – must be allowed back to Iraq, he says.

Yet a good part of the responsibility for reconciliation also lies with Kurds. After all, the struggle for control of Iraq's oil resources and the fate of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which Kurds claim as part of their region, are some of the most divisive issues facing the country.

Mr Barzani gives no hint of progress on either front, criticising the central government in Baghdad for its alleged intransigence, and taking none of the blame.

Oil legislation that would ensure a fair distribution of wealth – a key to the country's long-term stability – has been blocked, with Kurdish officials unwilling to give Baghdad veto power over the development of the

industry within their territory and the central government insisting that it must direct the oil industry's development throughout Iraq. The KRG has signed dozens of oil contracts that the central government has refused to recognise.

For Mr Barzani, however, the problem lies in the failure of the oil ministry, which has made no progress in managing the industry in the rest of Iraq. "They haven't been able to do things so they don't want anyone else to do it," he says. The oil ministry has spent billions of dollars, he charges, yet it has failed to meet its promise of boosting production.

On the issue of Kirkuk, Mr Barzani says Kurds have shown flexibility but would not renounce their claim to the city as part of their autonomous region. As Kurds populate Kirkuk, reversing the Arabisation policy of the previous regime, many Iraqis fear the town will be the flashpoint of renewed violence.

A census and referendum that were supposed to be completed by 2007 have been repeatedly postponed, amid concerns that Kurds and Arabs must first agree a political settlement to prevent a conflagration.

Mr Barzani says Kurds have compromised by agreeing to postpone the referendum. But they still want the population to decide on the identity of Kirkuk. "We are confident that it's part of Kurdistan. If they [other parties in Iraq] think the Kurds have to give up on it that will not happen," he says.

Pressure on Kurds, however, could rise as US political influence and its mediating power wanes. The results of the January provincial elections could also bring new constraints.

The poll strengthened the position of Nouri al-Maliki, the prime minister, and suggested that Iraqis favoured a strong central authority. Meanwhile, the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, the main Shia party, which favours autonomy in southern provinces and has been an important Kurdish ally, took a battering.

Mr Barzani, however, disputes the assumption that the elections undermined the push for autonomy for Iraq's regions under a federal system.

He points out that no party list won throughout the country and that each community voted for its own leaders. "It [the election] was an indicator that the viable solution for Iraq is a federal system."

This article can be found at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/682cd4a6-0ea7-11dc-b099-0000779fd2ac.html>

This article can also be found at: www.krp.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2009 3:45 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani's interview with Asharq Al-Awsat (UK)

Asharq Al-Awsat interviews President Barzani

March 16, 2009

London, Asharq Al-Awsat - President of the Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani has said there is a limit to patience, in reference to the pending issues between the Erbil government and the Baghdad government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, which include the issues of Kirkuk, the disputed areas, the oil and gas law, and the oil resources issue.

Barzani renewed his warning against violation of the Iraqi constitution, affirming: "When we agreed to remain within Iraq and contribute to the political process, we did that with the view that we will have a constitution ... This constitution defined the identity of Iraq, which is a federal Iraq."

In an exclusive interview with Asharq Al-Awsat in London, where he arrived in the course of a European tour, Barzani said that the time when one person could rule Iraq had gone. However, he noted that the strength of the Kurds lies in staying within a federal Iraq. He said he would prefer death rather than exist with a dictatorial Iraq. Barzani noted that the Americans are extending assistance to central and southern Iraq but not to the Kurds. He said that the Kurdistan region existed before the Americans came to Iraq and it will continue to exist after they leave.

Regarding the establishment of a Kurdish state, Barzani said, "This is a legitimate ambition, but we deal with matters according to the existing realities." He affirmed that the Kurdistan Democratic Party [KDP], which he heads, does not exploit the problems facing its rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK] led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, but is cooperating to solve them. Barzani affirmed, "We will be a true and faithful ally in their crisis under all circumstances."

The following is the full text of the interview.

What is the nature and results of your European tour?

The tour is taking place at the invitation of Italy, Germany, and Britain. The purpose is to explain the situation in Iraq, in general, and in the Kurdistan Region, in particular, and to encourage them to invest in Iraq and in the Region, because the security situation is good and because the Region is the secure gate to all Iraq. We explained the developments of the situation and the future prospects. The tour is political, economic, and diplomatic.

Although several European countries, Turkey, and Iran opened consulates in the Kurdistan Region, why the Arab states have not done the same?

This is a good question, but I pose this question, through the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, to the Arab states. Why do they not open consulates in Erbil? The reason is not security. Everyone knows that the security situation in the Region is stable. Perhaps they have not reached a conviction yet, although during my recent visits to Kuwait and Qatar, we achieved much progress in the relations and in the understanding with the two states.

Are you considering hosting the Arab summit conference if Iraq decides to hold it on its territory as part of its protocol rights?

I cannot send invitations to host the Arab summit, but I can say that the Kurdistan Region would be very delighted to have this conference held in Erbil and to provide all the needs for its success, including the security, comfort, dialogue atmosphere, and everything the conference will demand. However, others and not I must send the invitations.

You call the government in Baghdad "federal" and it insists on calling itself "central." How do you explain that?

We must understand that everything we accepted was because of the Constitution. When we accepted to remain within Iraq and contribute to the political process, we did that with the view that we will have a constitution. There was a referendum on this constitution, which defined the identity of Iraq as a federal country. The government is a federal government. If the central government means a single person ruling Iraq, this time has gone. If the purpose is to strengthen the role of the federal government with its constitutional institutions, decisions, and laws, we welcome that.

Do you think that there are violations of the Constitution?

Of course. Major and serious violations of the Constitution have taken place. We have differences with the federal government. We formed committees to study the issues and we hope that we would achieve results.

How will you deal with the constitutional amendments demanded by the prime minister of the federal government?

Any constitutional amendment must be made based on the mechanism provided in the Constitution. No amendments to the Constitution can be made contrary to the mechanisms in it. We will not oppose any amendment that takes place according to the mechanism in the Constitution. But if this takes place contrary to this mechanism, this would torpedo the Constitution.

There are pending issues between you and the government in Baghdad, such as the oil law, the Kirkuk issue, and Article 140 [of the Constitution].

We have tolerated a great deal because we cared about the interest of Iraq. We gave more time and chances to the officials, and lately we formed five committees to discuss these issues. We hope that the committees would achieve results on all these basic issues, which are the partnership, the security and the army, the oil and gas, Article 140, and foreign policy. We will exert efforts to energize these committees to give us a clear picture on the situation and the future prospects and the possibility of reaching a common understanding about these issues. Then, the other issues would become very simple. Let us wait and see what these committees will achieve.

What are the limits of your patience?

Of course, there is a limit to patience (laughing). These issues must be resolved. Again, I say the Constitution is our arbiter. We reject temperamental decisions and accept any decision consistent with the Constitution, whether in our favor or not. Our relations are governed by this Constitution, and we will not accept any other decision or view.

Can you imagine Kurdistan Region without Kirkuk?

Kirkuk has been the cause of all the problems that the Kurds had with the Iraqi governments. Now we want a solution to the problem, and we do not want to make the problem worse. It is possible to solve this problem according to Article 140 of the Constitution. This is the best solution to the Kirkuk issue. We stress the importance of applying Article 140 to end this problem for good. There can be no stability in Iraq without a solution to the Kirkuk problem.

What is your opinion about the proposal to divide the authority in Kirkuk and about another proposal to regard Kirkuk as an independent region?

We totally reject these circumventions of Article 140. Article 140 of the Constitution says: normalization, census, and referendum. The Kirkuk Governorate people are the ones to decide. If they decide that they want to be part of the Kurdistan Region, we must respect their opinion and choice. If they decide to join another region and if the Kirkuk people decide that their governorate should be independent, we will respect their decision. But, Article 140 must be implemented.

Do you know what the federal or central government wants from the Kurds?

It seems to me that some officials in Baghdad believe that the Kurdistan Region should be a governorate subordinate to Baghdad and that no institutions like the parliament and the ministries should exist. They want the Region to be subordinate to Baghdad and there should be no Kurdistan Region and no gains, rights, or anything.

Some in Iraq are talking about the demands of the Kurds becoming too high. What is your opinion about this?

This is not true. Our demands are less than the reality and cannot compare with the sacrifices we have made for Iraq and for Kurdistan. Our demands are Iraqi-Kurdish and not only Kurdish. When we emphasize democracy, this is a matter that interests every Iraqi citizen. When we talk about partnership, we do not mean Kurdish Arab partnership, but the partnership of the political forces in Iraq. Some forces have struggled and offered sacrifices. So how could we deprive them of participation in building the country? There are basic components in Iraq. So how could we marginalize them? The issue of partnership is not a Kurdish demand only. There are also the issues of the army, security, oil, and gas. All these are the property of the Iraqi people. How could one component unilaterally appoint officers in the Iraqi army and circumvent the Constitution and the parliament? The army is the army of the Iraqi people, and balance must exist in it. These issues do not affect the Kurds alone, but all Iraqis. We are defending the future of Iraq, democracy, and the Constitution in Iraq. We are defending so that Iraq would not face the same tragedy we faced in the past.

Are you disappointed with some Iraqi political forces, which you embraced and sacrificed for since 1991?

I am very sorry to say that some have disappointed us by their positions towards our cause. We never expected such a position. We imagined that they, in our absence, would defend the Kurdish cause and the rights of the Kurds. We trusted them to this extent.

In the last conference of the Iraqi opposition in London in 2002, an agreement was reached between the political forces that currently exist in Baghdad about the rights of the Kurds. What happened later?

These rights are entrenched even in the Constitution. The agreements reached at the London conference were almost all recorded in the Constitution in one form or another. Now, attempts are being made to circumvent the Constitution. How can we talk about agreements that took place in an opposition conference?

Do you think that Khanaqin and Mandali are within the disputed areas?

Of course. If we use the recent provincial elections as a basis, we will find that the Kurdish list won the votes of all the citizens and won all the seats there.

Are measures taking place in Kirkuk and the rest of the disputed areas similar, in your opinion, to the measures carried out by the former regime, such as increasing the government forces and appointing a percentage of Arab officers higher than the other components?

Yes, this type of practices regrettably exists.

Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani has expressed the Region's fears if the United States withdrew its forces from Iraq. How do you explain these fears?

If the American forces withdrew before the political situation in Iraq stabilizes and before the political forces are ready to fill the vacuum, problems will definitely arise. There are dangers and there is a possibility that major problems would take place in Iraq between the Sunnis and Shi'is and between the Arabs and the Kurds. Everything is possible.

Do the fears include the possibility of a military confrontation between the central government and the Kurdistan Region?

We hope this will not happen. We are not thinking that matters would reach this point. There will be no repetition of this in Iraq, God willing. We all must use the weapon of the Constitution to resolve our problems and not think of another way, particularly the military way. We hope that we will not have to get to that point. Whoever uses the Constitution as the arbiter will ultimately win.

What have the American forces provided to the Kurdistan Region?

Actually, the American forces have no presence in the Region. They had no presence and had not given us anything, even in term of aid. I say frankly that the US Administration has not given any aid to the Region. All expenditures took place in central and southern Iraq and not in Kurdistan. We had no security or administrative vacuum after the fall of the former regime. The Kurdistan Region existed before the arrival of the Americans, and it will continue to exist after they leave. But America's presence now protects Iraq against many threats. It also guarantees that no internal problems would take place.

Do you feel that you are alone working and struggling politically for the Kurdish cause?

No, Iraqi and Arab political forces are cooperating and maintaining solidarity with us. They agree with our views and policies. I have also noticed that there is much Arab interest in countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar and in Europe in our issues. We are not alone. Also, relations have recently improved with Turkey.

What is the rate of progress in the relations between Kurdistan and Turkey?

Meetings are taking place with Turkey. There is good Turkish understanding and I can see very broad horizons for commercial cooperation with neighboring Turkey. There are more than 500 Turkish companies operating in the Kurdistan Region. I can say that we are very satisfied with the progress in our relations with Turkey.

Are you no longer afraid of any military threats from Turkey?

No, no. the course of the relations indicates that the situation is good.

When some problems occurred in the PUK, your ally, some feared that the balances in the Region would collapse.

Regrettably, it is true that some internal problems took place in the PUK, but I am confident of the ability and wisdom of President Jalal Talabani and the PUK leadership to overcome and resolve these problems. We offered any assistance to allow the PUK to avoid such problems to safeguard the Region's balance and unity.

How the PUK problems affecting your work or affecting the stability and balances in the Kurdistan Region?

The KDP is not exploiting these problems at all - on the contrary; we are cooperating with the PUK to solve these problems. This is a firm decision. We will be a true and faithful ally in their crisis under all circumstances. We will stand with the PUK to solve any crisis it could face.

What will be your position in case independent lists run in the next parliamentary elections outside the Kurdistan Coalition?

Any person, party, or list has the right to run in the next parliamentary elections. This is their legitimate right.

Will that not upset the balance of your alliance with the PUK?

If this happens, the leaders of the two parties will study the situation. If the issue does not affect the organizations of the two parties, any citizen will be free to run. But if the candidate is from within the two parties and wanted to run in the elections outside the parties, we should study this matter.

Who will head the next government of the Kurdistan Region?

Based on the agreement with the PUK, they are entitled to head the next government.

Was this an agreement?

Yes, this was an agreement, and we will abide it.

Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani had worked on projects and programs, some of which at his personal initiative and by virtue of his relationships. Do you not think that if someone else assumes the premiership of the government, this could affect the current plans and achievements?

Government programs will definitely be affected, but this is a right for our ally and we cannot take it away from it. It is possible to discuss the issue, but let me repeat that this is their right. However, if they showed interest in the continuation of the work and the success of the government plans and if they raised another issue, we will discuss it. I will repeat for the third time: our ally is entitled to the premiership of the government.

How do you describe the unity between the PUK and the KDP?

The unity is strong and strategic, and there is no way to forfeit it.

But some said there would be problems between the two parties if the problems in the PUK persisted.

These are dreams.

What is the relationship between the KDP and the government in the Kurdistan Region?

The party is a means and not an end for serving the people and creating an entity. Now we have reached the point of building constitutional institutions, state institutions. We have a government and parliament. The government is for all the citizens. The party supports the government, which must lead the Kurdistan Region. The task of the party is to support the government and not to interfere in its affairs. We are taking this course in all the political, economic, and security fields. The government is leading the Kurdistan Region and not the party.

Do you still have an ambition to establish a Kurdish state?

Yes, this is a legitimate ambition, but we are dealing with matters according to the existing realities.

Do you expect the situation of Iraqi Kurds to be better without Iraq?

No, of course not. The strength of the Kurds lies in a federal democratic Iraq, but I would prefer death rather than exist with a dictatorial Iraq.

How do you confront the views of some extremist Arab nationalists and their positions towards the Kurdistan Region?

Some people have such views and must learn a lesson from the past. They must realize where this kind of thinking and approach had led Iraq. Do they want to repeat the failed and destructive experiment in Iraq? I do not think that they have any future. What they are suggesting are mere words and pose temporary obstacles in the way of democratic Iraq.

When will you complete the unification of Kurdish government institutions, including the security services?

We would have completed it had it not been for the internal crisis that took place in the PUK. We suspended the issue until the PUK resolves its internal crisis. One of our priorities now is to assist the PUK in overcoming its crisis.

Will the cut in the budget affect the Region's projects?

Definitely.

Why your government is not permitted to produce and export oil to finance its projects?

Let me tell you something: The Oil Ministry has not provided any tangible service to Iraq. The Oil Ministry received \$8 billion to improve and develop the oil sector, but it did nothing. It did not develop any oilfield nor build or develop any oil refineries. Where did the money go? Was the Oil Ministry able to conclude a reasonable and respectable oil agreement with any company in the world? They destroyed Iraq by their wrong policy, and they want us not to do anything. Regarding the issue of oil exports from the Region's fields, the Region can export 100,000 barrels of oil daily. We said we want to export oil through the oil pipeline between Kirkuk and the Turkish Ceyhan port. The revenues could go to the federal government, but we would take our share as stipulated in the Constitution, which is 17 per cent. The Oil Ministry did not agree, although Iraq currently exports less than its capacity and quota of oil. The oil is ready for export. The revenues would go to the Iraqi people, but the federal government is objecting.

What is your opinion about the agreements and contracts that the Region's prime minister signed with international companies? What is their fate?

These agreements and contracts are valid and we will not go back on them or abandon them. We will work hard to reach an agreement about the oil and gas law and the oil revenues law. The law will be implemented. Based on this law, we will launch our projects. But if the Oil Ministry sticks to its wrong approach and failed policy, we will not pay attention to what the ministry does and we will continue with our projects. We are not doing this for the sake of the Kurdistan Region only, but for all the people of Iraq. We will not follow the wrong path taken by the Oil Ministry.

What is the extent of your satisfaction with the prime minister of the Kurdistan Region?

There is no doubt that Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani has proven his high qualification and ability to run the government in the Kurdistan Region, as testified by everyone. To safeguard the supreme interests of the Region, he might be asked to continue to head the government - this is although I affirm that the PUK is entitled to this position. I am definitely very much satisfied with him. I love him and admire him. I do not want to praise him, because I regard him as part of me, which means that I would be praising myself. He is part of my life and the dearest person to me. This is from the personal standpoint, and from the practical standpoint, he has been successful, as testified by everyone.

Rumours are circulating in the Kurdistan Region about a hidden conflict between your eldest son, Masrur, and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani about the latter's position. How true is this?

I assure you that these are the mere illusions and wishes of some simple people. I assure you that if Masrur felt there is a danger to Nechirvan, he would be ready to face the danger instead of Nechirvan. There is no competition and there will be no competition. There is strong and close unity between them and between the members of our family. There are persons in the family that I am not satisfied with. We have a big clan, and I am not responsible for the actions of everyone. But as far as the close family members are concerned, particularly the sons of my late brother Idris, they are dearer to me than my children are. This is from the family and personal standpoint. I know that my children are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the children of their uncle Idris.

Are there attempts to divide the family?

Many have tried but failed.

This interview can be found at: www.krg.org

This interview can also be found at: www.krp.org

Note: BGR Group has filed registration statements under the Foreign Agents Registration Act with regard to its representation and dissemination of information on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Additional information is on file with the Foreign Agents Registration Unit of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC

Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2009 7:08 PM
Subject: US Congress and the United Nations commemorate the Halabja genocide

US House and Senate members commemorate Halabja genocide

Members voice warnings to prevent future slaughter, call for helping victims

March 19, 2008

Washington, US (KRG.org) – The 1988 genocide of more than 5,000 Kurds in the town of Halabja by Saddam Hussein was commemorated on the floors of the US House of Representatives and Senate. Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Howard Berman and Senator Joe Lieberman yesterday issued statements recalling the horrors of the chemical attacks, while also demanding help for those who survived.

Chairman Berman (D-CA) said the slaughter at Halabja was “one of modern history's most horrific crimes.” Berman said it is imperative that the Halabja massacre and the larger genocide against the Kurds conducted in the Anfal campaign, be “documented and remembered - and internationally recognised as a crime of genocide against the Kurdish people.”

“The world must not only remember the individuals who perished but also provide help to those that continue to suffer today. That would be an appropriate way for the world to bear witness to crimes that are among the ugliest the world has seen,” Chairman Berman said.

At least 5,000 people died as an immediate result of the chemical attack on March 16, 1988. Thousands more were injured or suffered long-term illness and birth defects after being exposed to the noxious mix of nerve agents. The attack against Halabja remains the largest-scale chemical weapons assault directed against a civilian-populated area in history.

“What happened in Halabja should remind us that there is, unfortunately, such a thing as evil in the world, and that we in the United States not only protect our security but uphold our most cherished humanitarian values when we fight against it,” said Senator Lieberman (I-CT) on the Senate floor.

Lieberman said that in pausing to remember the Halabja horror, “We should also give thanks to the extraordinary progress that has been achieved since that terrible day 21 years ago - progress that has been made possible through the courage and sacrifice of Kurds, Iraqis and Americans alike.”

First United Nations commemoration of Halabja genocide

Diplomats, victims and human rights advocates urge annual recognition and increased activism as steps to deter future slaughters

March 18, 2009

New York, US (KRG.org) - The enduring tragedies of the 1988 chemical weapons attack against the Kurdish city of Halabja were commemorated for the first time at the United Nations on Monday. The commemoration, co-hosted by the Iraqi Mission to the UN and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), saw ambassadors,

members of the Iraqi parliament, the human rights community and survivors decry the world's silence at the time and urged steps to ensure no similar genocide again occurs.

Iraq's Ambassador to the United Nations, Dr Hamid Al-Bayati, said holding the commemoration at the UN on the 21st anniversary of the genocide was an important milestone for the world to acknowledge the terror inflicted and the lack of action to protect the innocent and bring to justice those responsible.

"We come into the United Nations after we have told our story in the streets of New York, Washington and London" Al-Bayati said. "This is history." The Ambassador called on the United Nations to set March 16 as an annual commemoration "with the hope that atrocities like this will not occur again"

At least 5,000 people died as an immediate result of the chemical attack on March 16, 1988, and again on March 18. A further 7,000 people were injured or suffered long term illness and birth defects after being exposed to the nerve agents Tabun, Sarin, and VX, as well as mustard gas. While the attack against Halabja remains the largest-scale, single chemical weapons assault directed against a civilian-populated area in history, the attacks were part of a larger systematic operation named Anfal which was aimed at eradicating the Kurds.

"Halabja, once a vibrant centre of Kurdish culture was, in a day, turned into a symbol of Kurdish tragedy," said Qubad Talabani, the KRG's representative to the US. "It is our ground zero."

Discussing steps world leaders must take to prevent genocide were Ambassador Peter Galbraith and Mr Liebe Geft, director of the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. Galbraith recalled his discovery of Saddam's campaign of atrocities in 1987 and how world governments and officials must not dilute the horror for the sake of short-term expediencies with a rogue nation. Geft said the commemoration "embodies our hopes and our dreams for a more tolerant future." Representatives of the Turkish and Iranian missions to the UN read statements of solidarity.

During the commemoration Human Rights Watch was recognised by the KRG for its work to expose and document the genocide of the Kurds by Saddam Hussein. Kenneth Roth, executive director, said the world must never again accept geopolitical excuses as the reasons for inaction against genocide, such as that against the Kurds. "It is wrong to close one's eyes to atrocities," Roth said. "Once a measure of impunity is set, all kinds of dictators around the world are all too eager to listen and to act,"

A photographic exhibition documenting the Halabja genocide was unveiled and will remain on display in the United Nations Headquarters in New York, before travelling to various locations across the US. The exhibition will then become part of the permanent work at The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

These articles can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, March 20, 2009 2:14 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani meets EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Brussels

President Barzani meets EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Brussels

March 20, 2009

Brussels, Belgium (KRG.org) - As part of an extensive European tour, Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani visited Brussels on Wednesday. During his one-day visit, Mr Barzani met Mr Javier Solana, the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The President and Mr Solana exchanged views on the latest developments in Iraq and on issues of particular interest to the Kurdistan Region. President Barzani expressed his appreciation for the European Union's commitment to a federal and democratic Iraq and urged the EU to encourage trade and investment in the Kurdistan Region as a gateway to all of the country.

Earlier in the day President Barzani welcomed a delegation of the Iraqi federal parliament and met Iraq's ambassador to Belgium.

The President's visit to Brussels and his European tour are part of the Kurdistan Region's efforts to encourage international support for Iraq's political process and to attract foreign investment to the Kurdistan Region. Earlier this month he visited Italy, the Vatican, Germany and the UK.

Dr Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff of the Kurdistan Region Presidency, and Mr Burhan Jaf, Head of the KRG Mission to the EU, were part of the President's delegation in Brussels.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2009 6:52 PM
Subject: KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani meets Turkish President Gul in Baghdad

KRG Prime Minister Barzani meets Turkish President Gul in Baghdad

March 25, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan - Iraq (KRG.org) – Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani conducted a meeting with the President of Turkey, Mr. Abdullah Gul, in Baghdad. President Gul's visit to Iraq was the first of a Turkish Head of State in 33 years.

The meeting was open and cordial, and the Prime Minister warmly thanked President Gul for his visit and his support. The Prime Minister explained that it is in the interest of the Kurdistan Region and all of Iraq to foster good neighborly relations with Turkey. And he reiterated his government's policy to expand and consolidate peaceful relations with neighboring countries.

President Gul explained that Turkey was ready and willing to work with the new Iraq.

Prime Minister Barzani said, "This was a very positive meeting, and it sends the right message. We will not reach a solution in one meeting, of course." He continued, "However, if we look back to one year ago, we see that the situation has improved a lot, and I think this has been a very positive step. We are on the right path. The KRG will spare no effort in the development of this relationship."

This meeting comes as part of the normalization process between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey. The focus was on the issues of economic cooperation, the expansion of commercial relations between Turkey and both the Kurdistan Region and Iraq as a whole, and on border security.

The KRG policy, in line with the Constitution of Iraq, is against the use of Iraqi soil for military attacks on our neighbors, and Prime Minister Barzani stressed his complete adherence to this policy.

Prime Minister Barzani also met with Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Their discussion centered on the relationship between Federal Iraq and the KRG, and on the unresolved issues yet to be addressed in Iraq. These issues are currently under consideration in committees. Prime Minister Barzani emphasized the will of the Kurdistan Region to participate in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation in order to find mutually acceptable solutions to the issues.

Prime Minister Barzani attended a lunch banquet, hosted by Prime Minister Maliki, and a dinner reception, hosted by President Jalal Talabani – both in honor of the visit by President Gul.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, March 27, 2009 5:05 PM
Subject: President Obama thanks KRG President Masoud Barzani

President Obama thanks President Barzani

March 27, 2009

Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani has received a letter from United States President Barack Obama in response to a congratulatory letter on Obama's presidential election victory.

In the letter, President Obama thanks President Barzani for his salutations. He also expresses his hope that relations between the United States of America on the one hand, and Iraq and the Kurdistan Region on the other, will be further strengthened over the coming years and they will work together for a better and more peaceful world.

President Obama also sends his greetings to the people of the Kurdistan region in the letter.

This article can be found at: www.krp.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 2:38 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani meets President Obama in Baghdad

President Barzani meets President Obama in Baghdad

April 8, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan - Iraq (KRG.org) – President of the Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani yesterday met US President Barack Obama in Baghdad. This was President Obama's first trip to Iraq since his inauguration in January 2009.

In their meeting President Barzani and President Obama discussed many issues including the latest developments in the Kurdistan Region and the overall situation in Iraq. President Barzani made clear that the Kurdistan Region remains committed to being part of the solution in Iraq and invited President Obama to visit the Kurdistan Region on a future trip.

President Barzani said, “The Kurdistan Region has always worked to be a part of the solution not the problem in Iraq. We contributed in the political process, which culminated in the creation of the Iraqi constitution. We want to emphasise our full commitment to working with all parties and abiding by the Iraqi constitution to support a democratic, federal Iraq”.

With regards to the hydrocarbon law, President Barzani said that oil contracts in the Kurdistan Region were made in a legal and transparent manner in full accordance with the Iraqi constitution, stating “Oil and gas in the country belongs to all the people of Iraq and all revenues should be shared equally.”

President Barzani noted that America played an important role in Iraq's liberation and expressed his appreciation for the many sacrifices made by the men and women of American and coalition forces. He fully understood that America would not stay in Iraq permanently, hence the importance of continuing to work together to resolve any outstanding issues and fight terrorism, both through military and political means.

President Obama thanked President Barzani for sharing his views. He said that he was mindful of the tragic history of the Kurds, and had good impressions of the progress in the Kurdistan Region which was the result of hard work and strong leadership.

President Obama also expressed his pleasure that relations between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey have been improving, and noted that during his recent visit to Turkey he discussed those relations. At the conclusion of the meeting, President Obama noted that strict adherence to the Iraqi constitution remains the best mechanism for peace and stability in Iraq and said he looked forward to hearing from President Barzani and working closely with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to make further progress.

President Barzani was accompanied by KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani; Dr Roj Nouri Shawis, President Barzani's Special Envoy to Baghdad; Dr Fuad Hussein, President Barzani's Chief of Staff; and Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations.

Accompanying President Obama were Mr Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's Chief of Staff; General James L. Jones, National Security Advisor; General Raymond Odierno, Commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq; and Ms Patricia Butenis, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim at the US Embassy in Baghdad as well as several other advisers and representatives from President Obama's administration.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, April 24, 2009 3:36 PM
Subject: KRG officials build closer ties with the Obama administration on US visit

KRG officials build closer ties with Obama administration on US visit

April 23, 2009

Washington DC, US (KRG.org) – Dr Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to the President of the Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani, Mr Falah Mustafa Bakir, Minister and Head of the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Department of Foreign Relations, and Mr Qubad Talabani the KRG's Representative to the US, met with senior US officials in a series of meetings and events in the latest step to further strengthen the relationship between the Kurdistan Region and the Obama administration.

The extended trip to Washington followed the meeting between President Obama and President Barzani in Baghdad earlier this month and was aimed at continuing the exchange of ideas on how best to build on Iraqi Kurdistan's democratic foundation while addressing the still unresolved political issues in Iraq.

“We are grateful to our friends in the Obama administration for their determination to keep our friendship alive and strong, as well as for their continued dialogue with us on how we can work together to build a federal and democratic Iraq that abides by, and respects its democratically ratified constitution” Dr Hussein said.

The discussions, at the National Security Council, the State Department and the Defense Department, focused on the need to resolve Iraq's outstanding political issues, including the resolution of the disputed territories in accordance with Article 140 of Iraq's permanent constitution, enactment of a constitutionally regulated national hydrocarbons law and the upcoming elections in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The KRG officials also detailed the progress in building upon the foundation of democracy, including the mechanisms that will produce a record number of women elected to the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region. The Kurdistan Regional Government is proud of the progress made thus far in continuing to nurture the democratisation of the Region; last October, the Kurdistan Parliament passed one of the most liberal press laws in the Middle East.

“To come to Washington and meet with US officials, who are as determined as we are to make sure the freedoms we enjoy remain strong is reassuring to all of us” Mr Bakir said. “We know what we must do to continue to build on our democratic progress and our determination is made stronger knowing our allies will be there in support.”

The delegation also took part in a two-day forum, sponsored by The Atlantic Council, in which participants discussed the progress made on all aspects of the relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, including the need for all involved to build on that progress.

The delegation from the Kurdistan Region met scholars at the Center for American Progress, a Washington DC based think tank and spoke to the US national media. They participated in the 3rd annual conference of the Kurdish American Youth Organisation in San Diego, California, meeting representatives from San Diego's Kurdish community.

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, April 24, 2009 4:42 PM
Subject: KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani meets with Amnesty International, reaffirms KRG's strong commitment to human rights

Kurdistan Region: Prime Minister makes encouraging promises to Amnesty International

April 23, 2009

Amnesty International press release

Amnesty International welcomes the strong commitment to human rights expressed by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in a meeting with the organization in Erbil today.

"The Prime Minister said he has personally read Amnesty International's report, published last week, and has instructed that its recommendations be circulated to the detention authorities and to government ministries," said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Region and head of Amnesty International's delegation in the Kurdistan Region. "The Prime Minister assured us too of his determination to ensure that the Asayish and other security agencies, whose record we have criticized, are made fully accountable under the law."

At the meeting, Prime Minister Barzani told Amnesty International that a new law was being prepared to make the Asayish accountable to the Council of Ministers, though the timetable for this was still unclear.

The Prime Minister also assured Amnesty International that he and his government are committed to stamping out so-called honour crimes and to ensure that women are afforded effective protection against violence, including within the family.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government has taken positive human rights steps in recent years," said Malcolm Smart. "In particular, it has put in place concrete measures to combat violence against women, and we are heartened by this. At the same time, we emphasized the need to ensure that women's human rights defenders are fully involved in all stages of developing and implementing policies to end violence, discrimination and to increase life opportunities for women and girls."

Amnesty International's visit to the Kurdistan Region follows the publication last week of its report, *Hope and Fear: Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*.

The report described recent improvements including the release of hundreds of long term political detainees in 2008 and legal reforms affecting the status of women and media freedom but expressed concern about serious violations by the Asayish and other security forces and called for them to be held fully to account.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

The Amnesty International press release can be found at: www.amnesty.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2009 3:59 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani speaks with Hillary Clinton, receives Admiral Michael Mullen

President Barzani, Hillary Clinton Reaffirm Commitment to Iraq Political Process

April 26, 2009

Salahaddin, Iraq (KRP.org) - Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reaffirmed their support and commitment to the political process in Iraq and to the Iraqi Constitution.

Secretary Clinton telephoned President Barzani this morning from Baghdad, where she arrived yesterday.

This is Secretary Clinton's fourth visit to Iraq, the first as secretary of state.

President Barzani meets Admiral Michael Mullen

April 25, 2009

Erbil, Iraq (KRP.org) - Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani received Admiral Michael Mullen, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff at Erbil International airport.

In a meeting between the two, the President and Admiral Mullen reviewed a host of security issues in Iraq and particularly in the Kurdistan Region.

This visit comes following a string of visits to the Kurdistan Region by top U.S. and Multi-National Forces commanders, including visits by General Raymond Odierno (Commanding General of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq), General Robert Brown (Commanding General of the Multi-National Forces-North in Iraq), and Brigadier General Robin Swan, the new Chief of Staff of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq.

These articles can be found at: www.krp.org

Note: BGR Group has filed registration statements under the Foreign Agents Registration Act with regard to its representation and dissemination of information on behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Additional information is on file with the Foreign Agents Registration Unit of the Department of Justice in Washington, DC

Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2009 1:37 PM
Subject: KRG Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami urges Iraqi lawmakers to pass a fair, transparent Revenue Sharing Law

Natural Resources Minister urges lawmakers to pass fair transparent Revenue Sharing Law at UNAMI conference

April 25, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) – Dr Ashti Hawrami, the Kurdistan Regional Government Minister for Natural Resources, said at a UN-sponsored conference that Iraq urgently needed to pass a fair and transparent revenue sharing law.

Dr Hawrami made his comments at a round-table conference in Erbil organised by UNAMI on ‘Hydrocarbon Resource Management in the Context of a Federal System’, on 7th and 8th April. The participants invited by UNAMI were Iraqi federal government and KRG officials, Iraqi and Kurdistan Region lawmakers and outside experts.

Minister Hawrami said, “It is my personal belief and real concern that if a fair, transparent and an unambiguous Revenue Sharing Law is not enacted soon...then the unity and the future of the country would be at risk.” He added, “All our political leaders and the Federal Parliament must take their responsibility seriously about this matter and act accordingly.”

Dr Hawrami made his comments at a UNAMI conference in Erbil on 8th April on ‘Hydrocarbon Resource Management in the Context of a Federal System’. He criticised politicians and lawmakers who have been pressing for carving out and removing large sums of the oil revenue for undefined ‘strategic projects’ before sharing it. He fears that this would lead to possible abuse and misuse of Iraq’s oil wealth.

The Minister also highlighted that the focus of discussions has shifted unhelpfully to a federal oil and gas law which, he said, is “Putting the cart before the horse. Without a prior agreement on the revenue sharing law, the oil and gas law then became unnecessarily contentious”.

Dr Hawrami criticized outdated practices by the federal Ministry of Oil, which has spent some \$8 billion over the last three years but still failed to boost production, in stark contrast to the KRG’s achievements. He said, “In a short period of time we have managed to create some real opportunities for the benefit of all Iraqis”.

The KRG’s achievements include the completion of: two refineries; a project to transfer reservoir gas to electricity thereby solving a substantial part of the Kurdistan Region’s power needs; a constitutionally compliant Kurdistan Region Oil and Gas Law and a state-of-the art production sharing model contract for small blocks; three oil field discoveries so far, and more to come.

The Minister added, “We are ready to export 100,000 barrels a day right now; that will gradually increase to 250,000 once the additional field pipelines are completed by the end of this year or early next year. We could have been exporting this oil well over a year ago, but due to the lack of cooperation from the oil ministry, the oil export was kept back, thus Iraq has lost billions of dollars so far and will continue to lose million of dollars every day if this damaging policy is not stopped. KRG gets its 17% of Iraq’s budget anyway, so the losers are all of us in Iraq, and not just the KRG.”

Dr Hawrami concluded, “Real revenue sharing will bind us all together. The KRG has always shown flexibility in the past towards imaginative initiatives, and continues to look at new ideas constructively if they lead to solutions that will not compromise on constitutional arrangements.”

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Monday, May 04, 2009 6:50 PM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani meets with US Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill

President Barzani meets newly appointed US Ambassador Hill

May 3, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) – Newly appointed US Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill made his first trip to the Kurdistan Region, where he met Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani and other top officials.

President Barzani said, “I am delighted to welcome distinguished Ambassador Christopher Hill to the Kurdistan Region, and I look forward to working closely with him as we consider key issues in Iraq.” He added, “We are thankful to the US people, government and military for their contributions and sacrifices, and are pleased with our strengthened relations with the United States.”

President Barzani congratulated the Ambassador on taking up this new post and wished him great success, explaining that his diplomatic experience would be of great value. He pledged his continued cooperation with the US Embassy in Baghdad. He also briefed the Ambassador on the history of the Region, including the chemical gassing during the Anfal campaign of the former regime, the resistance of the people, and the contribution of the Kurdistan Region to democracy, federalism and pluralism in Iraq. President Barzani said that the Kurdistan Region has always promoted tolerance and peaceful coexistence, and would spare no effort in pursuing solutions through dialogue.

Ambassador Hill expressed his pleasure at meeting with President Barzani, and conveyed the warm wishes of President Obama. He emphasised the Obama Administration’s desire to enhance mutual cooperation and strengthen relations between the United States and the Kurdistan Region and all of Iraq. Mr Hill stressed the spirit of partnership and that he had come to the Region to hear from President Barzani directly.

The Ambassador explained that he has taken this position with a solemn duty, and hopes that outstanding issues will be addressed so that the sacrifices of soldiers will not have been in vain. He also articulated the importance of the positive developments between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey.

Both sides acknowledged that this was a critical time that presented a variety of challenges that must be faced together. Topics of discussion included relations between the Kurdistan Region and the federal government on key issues, such as the hydrocarbons law and the implementation of Article 140, the delicate situation in Mosul and Kirkuk, the recent UNAMI report, and recent and upcoming elections.

Ambassador Hill arrived with a delegation that included US Ambassador Robert Ford and other officials. Kurdistan Region Parliament Speaker Adnan Mufti, President Barzani’s special envoy to Baghdad Dr Roj Nouri Shaways, President Barzani’s Chief of Staff Dr Fuad Hussein, and Head of the Department of Foreign Relations Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir were also present. Ambassador Hill, who replaced former Ambassador Ryan Crocker in Baghdad, has vast experience in political negotiation in North Korea and the Balkans.

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Friday, May 08, 2009 10:19 AM
Subject: KRG President Masoud Barzani: Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament elections to be held on 25 July 2009

President Barzani: Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament elections to be held 25 July 2009

May 5, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (KRP.org) – Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani announced that the Kurdistan Region general elections will be held on 25 July 2009.

In a speech at the Parliament, President Barzani urged all the people of the Kurdistan Region to participate in the upcoming elections.

“After the Electoral Commission informed us that they would be able to supervise elections from the 20th of July 2009 onwards, we decided to set the 25 of July 2009 as the election day for the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament,” announced the President.

President Barzani noted that all competing lists are free to engage in propaganda and publicity for their candidates but he cautioned against overly negative personal attacks and urged all sides to abide by the regulations set by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq.

President Barzani made this statement during a session of the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament in Erbil today. This will be the third such election for the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament; the first was held following the Gulf War in 1992 and the last elections were held in 2005.

This article can be found at: www.krp.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Tuesday, May 12, 2009 9:58 AM
Subject: Announcement by KRG Minister for Natural Resources Dr. Ashti Hawrami

KRG oil exports update

May 10, 2009

I am pleased to confirm that today, 10th May 2009, I have received two letters addressed to the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Natural Resources in Erbil, issued by the Ministry of Oil in Baghdad, which states that export of oil from the Tawke and Taq-Taq oil fields in the Kurdistan Region should be expedited.

The letters have been signed by a Deputy Minister (Technical), communicated to us and the North Oil Company on 10 May 2009.

In the recent past we had excellent support from the North Oil Company on this subject, and we are delighted by this confirmation of renewed cooperation and we look forward to working with them again to ensure that our June 1st export deadline is met.

Dr Ashti Hawrami
Minister for Natural Resources
Kurdistan Regional Government

Ministry of Natural Resources announces start of crude oil exports from Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Announcement by Dr Ashti Hawrami
Minister for Natural Resources
Kurdistan Regional Government

8 May 2009

On behalf of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the KRG Ministry of Natural Resources announces that crude oil exports shall commence officially on 1 June 2009 from the Tawke Field, at an initial rate of around 60,000 barrels per day. This follows the completion of all the metering instrumentation and the tie-in of the field pipeline with the Iraq-Turkey main export pipeline at the border town of Fishkhabur.

In addition, during the coming month of June, some 40,000 barrels per day of light crude oil shall commence (by trucking) from the Taq-Taq field to the newly installed temporary loading and unloading facilities at the Khurmala Station located in South-West Erbil, and from there onwards it will be transported through the existing pipeline networks to the Iraq-Turkey export pipeline. This will be a temporary measure and will continue until a field pipeline is laid between the Taq-Taq field and the Khurmala Station.

The exported crude oil from both fields will be marketed by SOMO and the revenue will be deposited to the federal Iraq account for the benefit of all Iraqi people. The average API gravity of the crude oil mix at a combined rate of 100,000 barrels per day will be around 35 degrees. Once the Taq-Taq pipeline is laid and further upgrades are made to the Tawke pipeline, the combined exports from these two fields will reach 250,000 barrels per day, with the average API gravity of around 39 degrees. These higher API gravity oil mixes will improve on the overall quality of the present Kirkuk oil mix which is only around 31 degrees API.

To mark this occasion the Ministry of Natural Resources shall hold an opening ceremony at Fishkhabur. A number of dignitaries will be invited from the Kurdistan Parliament, the KRG, the Kurdistan oil sector, SOMO officials, the head and members of the Federal Parliament Energy Committee, the Federal Finance and Oil Ministers, the Governor of Duhok and other officials. Local and international media will also be invited.

This great historic achievement, which was accomplished in record time, is one of the KRG's contributions to raising oil production and revenue for the benefit of all Iraq. We wish to acknowledge and thank officials of the North Oil Company in Kirkuk for their technical support during the last year to facilitate the tie-in with the export pipeline. They, and other high level federal Ministry of Oil officials who have supported us in the process, will be invited to attend the ceremony to celebrate this important occasion with us.

These statements can be found at: www.krg.org

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Letter From Erbil

From: Letter From Erbil [letterfromerbil@kurdistantoday.net]
Sent: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 7:11 PM
Subject: KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani advances the KRG Good Governance & Transparency Initiative

Prime Minister Barzani advances governance and transparency initiative

May 17, 2009

Erbil, Kurdistan – Iraq (KRG.org) – Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani met with advisers yesterday to continue discussions on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Good Governance & Transparency Initiative.

The meeting included KRG advisers and experts from the global consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), engaged by the Prime Minister to provide strategic guidance on the issue.

Prime Minister Barzani emphasised the KRG's commitment to improve governance, transparency and anti-corruption practices. "We intend to conduct a thorough self-assessment of operations, and to develop an action plan that will help the KRG maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of government spending." He added, "The KRG, like many governments around the world, will pursue improvements in public sector spending mechanisms and oversight, with a focus on the reduction of corruption."

The Prime Minister's advisers presented the interim results of their fact-finding and assessment work that began in December 2008. The advisers have met with numerous ministers, members of parliament, government officials, the US Regional Reconstruction Team, and other relevant parties. The team has endeavoured to obtain information on the current state of government operations, with a view to making recommendations for improvement.

Deputy Prime Minister Imad Ahmad Sayfour also met the KRG and PwC advisers, stressing his personal support for the Good Governance & Transparency Initiative. "This initiative is very important for the people of Kurdistan and the people of Iraq. Efficient use of public funds and transparency of government operations will provide the people with the confidence that the KRG is acting in their best interests."

This article can be found at: www.krg.org

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